Religion of the Father: Islam, Gender, and Politics of Ethnicity in Late Socialism

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation examines the ethnicization of Islam among a specific ethnic group in China, namely the Hui. It is based upon sixteen months of multi-sited fieldwork conducted in China's Henan Province and Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region from 2010 to 2012. I argue that the particular ethno-imaginary of the Hui and their positioning vis-à-vis the Han majority – that they are both non-Han and more Han than the Han – are predicated upon a particular sexual economy. Islam is situated in an imagined dissymmetrical exchange of woman as that whose presumed truth can procure for the Hui the feminine "Han blood." The "nativization" of Islam among the Hui, i.e. its supposedly never complete "sinicization," occurs through the figure of the Han woman.

In Part I of this dissertation, I trace the itinerary of this figure in both historiographical narratives of the Hui in the early twentieth century and the organizational variations of their contemporary life as Muslims in a swiftly-changing China. In Part II, I move to a more general level, and study two major institutions in the Chinese state's governance of ethnic difference, namely ethnic regional autonomy and ethnic cadre. I situate them within the socialist tradition and unpack their specificity in contrast to other political configurations in the governance of ethnic difference (e.g. liberal multiculturalism). I suggest that this socialist governance of difference is defined by a biopolitical logic, and

argue that the link to sexuality that is intrinsic to the concept of biopolitics renders the Hui a particularly privileged site for exploring the complex relationship between the socialist politics of ethnicity and the socialist governance of sexuality.

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Introduction

There are those moments in ethnography when the anthropologist cannot extract a clear, articulate, and unequivocal interpretation of certain acts from the "informants," when, in other words, the "native's point of view" begins to contradict itself, even unknowingly. This happens when Cunhu, a young Hui Sufi living in Ningxia in northwest China, started to explain to me a daily show of etiquette among the Jahriyya Sufi that had befuddled me for quite a few days. "You have seen that we *zuoyi* every time we meet each other," he named the ritual before he set out to offer an explanation. "Now," he continued, "the Han also *zuoyi*. But we do it in a different way."

How it was different I did not perceive. It seemed to me that the Jahriyya Sufi *zuoyi* in exactly the same manner as the Han do: both form a fist with two hands, raised to the chest and swinging gently as the body bowed politely to greet the other. The degree of the bow depends on the assumed difference in social hierarchy between the two meeting parties: 90 degrees, when the upper body is in straight angle to the legs, indicate the highest degree of respect and deference. Cunhu, however, did insist that there was a key difference: "When we bow, the arms in fact draw a crescent." But shortly afterwards, he supplemented this interpretation with another comment. "You see," he said proudly, "the Han no longer *zuoyi*. But we the Hui still practice it. They have dumped their propriety (*li*), the essence of their civilization. We the Hui have preserved it for them. It is we who carry on the best of their culture."

But one is left confused, since an obvious contradiction can be seen between the two explanations otherwise supposed to complement each other. On the one hand, it seems that the particular emphasis laid on the "crescent" is intended to emphasize the minute difference considered nonetheless significant enough to distinguish the Hui variation of *zuoyi* from its Han "original." On the other, however, the comment on "preserving…the best of their culture" appears precisely as an attempt to write over the difference, and to write it over by means of a particular operation: we are different from the Han because, somewhat peculiarly, we are more Han than the Han. The Han will find "themselves" in us, yet the "them" they find in "us" would be slightly transfigured. We are both Han and non-Han, we are more Han than the Han precisely because we are not and can never be completely Han. We are, in other words, not-not-Han. Perhaps in the symptomatic contradiction revealed by Cunhu's explanation, the little "crescent" stands less for the insertion of Islam than for the intrusion into consciousness of a particular structuring of ethnic relations by means of which Islam as a "world religion" is necessarily mediated for the Hui.

Not all Jahriyya Sufi shared Cunhu's explanation. Some would laugh at my interpretation that took its cue from the "crescent," while others would merely say "yes, I heard some would go with that." Neither did the daily instantiations of the rite confirm Cunhu's explanation, as few would draw a "crescent" in their practice of *zuoyi* and most, according to my observation, merely performed it in a perfunctory manner that did not differ much from how it had been done among the Han. No one knew for sure what this daily rite meant specifically for the Hui, and no one was able to provide a specifically Hui explanation. The "crescent" bears its own mark of ambivalence, especially when it is

inscribed, not in any ritual, but in a particular kind of rite: the rite of daily etiquette, that through which social exchange occurs and by means of which human subjectivity is instituted. Does the "crescent," if it is ever intentionally drawn, demand recognition from the Han, as a sign that could mark out the Hui variation of *zuoyi*? What kind of recognition is requested and what message conveyed, especially when the Hui – specifically the Jahriyya Hui – only *zuoyi* to their fellow Sufis and never practice it when greeting a Han? Cunhu's contradictory interpretation points to a desire structured in a particularly intriguing way: the desire – of his and of all others' who either share his view or other views similarly self-contradictory – to be recognized in such a way that their difference only proves their proximity. They are so similar to the Han and so more Han than the Han that the Han could not recognize them as Han, or at the very least as the site where "authentic Hanness" – different from what the contemporary Han signify – is located but in the name of the Hui, and through the prism of Islam.

But how is this possible? How can an ethno-religious minority deny their complete assimilation into the majority while meanwhile asserting their difference, perhaps unconsciously, in such a way as to locate them *within* the majority? How can one be different in order to be "the same," as this sameness is in itself idealized and fantasized, *for* the Han but *by* the Hui? What kind of structure has situated the Hui in such a shadowy position and rendered them into spectres of the Han which nonetheless constantly struggle to assume more substantive shapes? How can a shadow rise to the level where it attempts to usurp the role of the body? How has Hui Islam been transformed by this structuring of ethnic relations? What are the specific symbolic, institutional, and political

conditions that both effectuate the ethnicization of Islam among the Hui and lead this ethnicization in particular directions that reflect and reconstruct their ethnic imaginary?

This dissertation is in part a response to these critical questions. Though the Hui Muslims, with a general population of over ten million, live practically in every single province, city, and county on China's vast territory, this dissertation itself is based upon 16 months of fieldwork in Henan Province (in the city of Zhengzhou and its immediate vicinity) and Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region (in Yinchuan, Wuzhong, and Qingtongxia). My work in Henan focuses primarily upon the sociological forms that Hui Islam assumes in an urban milieu, with a particular emphasis on the urban mosque as a localized institution by means of which the Islamic religion acquires its tenacity in the concrete social world. Despite the fact that cities are often supposed to be the nodal points around which both trans-local and transnational socio-economic and religious connections build themselves, my fieldwork shows that the institutionalization of Islam through the mosque produces a specific localization and laicization (in contrast to "secularization") that structurally marginalize the role of the clerical power in the daily management of the mosque. Instead of a spiritual island where religious obligations are performed and religious dispositions cultivated, a mosque is sociologically embedded and politically inscribed within the local community which it serves, and its "democratic" management, defined by a largely nominal "election" facilitated and at times dictated by the local government, systematically excludes clerical power from its governmental body and renders the mosque into a "communal property" managed by lay members of the local Hui community. Islam does not and cannot spread on its own. It is the institutional

arrangements and the material conditions – in other words, its political economy – that underpin its survival and flourishing that I am interested in.

My fieldwork in Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, on the other hand, focuses on a different form that Hui Islam assumes in an entirely different socio-economic context. Ningxia, among other northwestern provinces of China, is a major site where Hui Sufism prospers and produces its resonances both within China and beyond. In stark contrast to the urban Islam in Henan, which is largely confined within the local community and governed primarily by a group of lay and ordinary Muslims, Sufi orders among the Hui maintain vast trans-local networks that often traverse immense geographical distances. What sharpens the contrast is the fact that most – if not all – Sufi orders in China are located in the rural or recently urbanized areas, and their spiritual centers are almost invariably lodged in rural villages and towns. They might have unassuming stations in the city, either in the form of mosques or humble prayer halls adapted from the residence of deceased saints. But it is always the rural *daotang*s ("hall of Dao") that pump fresh blood into the veins that nourish the trans-local connections among the Hui Sufi.

To say this is not to reify the contrast between urban Islam in Henan and rural Sufism in Ningxia. Neither do I intend to imply that only the Sufi orders sustain and develop trans-local networks in which knowledge, information, donation, and personnel circulate either continuously or with specific calendrical punctuations. As I shall try to demonstrate in this dissertation, even the localized Islam in the urban milieu is integrated into trans-local networks that do not necessarily rely upon Sufi organization. These networks are often instituted by the movement of travelling imams and Islamic students in pursuit of advanced training and possible employment opportunities, and are often

separate from the lay institutions that govern the localized urban mosques. In other words, even in an urban environment, the mosque is not the exclusive site where Hui Islam maintains its material presence. The movement of imams and students often weaves vast geographical networks that cut across the rural-urban division, though this travelling often follows routes carved out by specific denominational affiliation. A non-Sufi imam would rarely visit Sufi shrines, and a Sufi imam would perhaps never drop by a mosque presided over by a Wahhabi cleric. Although some form of unintended and reluctant exchange might occur in some politically orchestrated occasions, different variations of Hui Islam seldom engage in systematic and purposeful interactions, and the travel of imams, therefore, could hardly be taken as an indication of the existence of a general *umma* among the Chinese Hui. Nonetheless, I still consider it worthwhile to describe and analyze the complex socio-economic and political factors that definitively frame the forms assumed by these profound movements. To a large extent, and across different denominations, the very job of a cleric is defined by its mobile character.

To be sure, ethnicization of Islam happens not merely among the Hui. There are ten ethnic groups in China officially recognized by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) as taking Islam as their "ethnic religion," and the Hui constitute merely one of them, though perhaps the most populous and influential. The Hui dominate the ranks of the All-China Islamic Association, though this association professes to represent all of China's Muslims. The ethnicization of Islam, therefore, goes beyond the Hui, but it is critical to note that the mechanism of this ethnicization might differ across different ethnic groups. This dissertation is interested in the mechanism of ethnicization specific to the Hui. Compared to the Uyghur whose rich religious and cultural world is often overshadowed by the

interlocked discourses of "ethnic secessionism" (the Chinese state) and "oppression of religion" (international media)[1], the Hui Muslims do not bear any remarkable character that might draw upon them the attention of international media: they do not have a territorial claim (not a single Hui whom I have interviewed has such claim, and I haven't come across any historical evidence that suggests otherwise), and living among and alongside the Han has been a "normal" form of residence rarely questioned. They do not speak a different language, and Chinese is indisputably their native tongue – even their form of Islam is heavily mediated by the Chinese language. They do not even have an incontestable ethnic identity, and there have been and continue to be inconclusive debates as to whether they constitute a distinct ethnic group different from the Han. Their less exposure and comparative (not total) invisibility to Western observers, especially their similarity to the Han majority, have also given Hui Islam a more capacious and flexible space in the CCP's governance of Islam. It is precisely in this flexible but no less complex space that I shall locate my study of Hui Islam in this dissertation.

But why do we need to focus on the Hui, if, as I have mentioned, the ethnicization of Islam happens among other Muslim minorities as well? What is it that makes the ethnicization of Islam among the Hui special, and therefore worthy of our ethnographic

[1] What is equally overshadowed and with much graver consequences is the serious deterioration of socio-economic conditions in the contemporary Uyghur society. First-hand information in this respect is extremely sparse, due to the CCP's barring of extensive fieldwork in Xinjiang and its strict censorship of media. Nonetheless, two figures prove to be particularly important and reliable in providing this much needed information. Huang Zhangjin, an excellent editor of the *Pheonix Weekly* (*Fenghuang Zhoukan*) based in Hong Kong, published his extraordinary and enormously influential analysis of the Uyghur society in 2012 on *iSun Affairs* (*Yangguang Shiwu Zhoukan*). (Huang, 2012) And Illham Tohti, a Uyghur professor of economics teaching in China's Central University of Nationalities, is another critical figure in spreading up-to-date information on contemporary Xinjiang. He is the founder of *Uyghur Online*, an influential Internet bulletin board service where topics pertaining to the Uyghur are freely discussed, both in Chinese and in the Uyghur language. He was arrested by the police in Urumqi in 2013 on the charge of "separatism" and the website was shut down by the state. Another "secular" Uyghur intellectual who has written tirelessly on contemporary Uyghur society is Gheyret Niyaz, who was arrested in 2009 and sentenced to fifteen years of imprisonment in 2010 on the charge of "crime against national secutiry."

and analytical attention? How is the specifically Hui ethnicization of Islam articulated with the peculiar structuring of ethnic relations according to which the Hui are situated in a position that makes them more Han than the Han? What kind of affective economy organizes and strengthens this articulation?

Islam, Gender, Recognition

Imam Mai was one of those rare clerical figures who could, even in a mosque, crack dirty jokes. None of those who work with him are exempt from his at times embarrassing humor. Imam Zhu, his colleague and assistant at Down Mosque in Zhengzhou and a shy man who often speaks softly, is a frequent target. Upon knowing that a Hui woman – an old friend of Zhu – somehow by mistake sent the latter a seducing text message initially meant for her Han husband, Mai winked to me and laughed. "Well," said he, "she certainly misses a halal dick (*qingzhen jiba*)!"

Woman figures prominently in the world of Imam Mai in more than one way, and all relate back to his position as a Hui cleric. "The most important channel for conversion is marriage," he told me. And not long afterwards, I myself witnessed one such conversion at Down. A young Hui man in his early 20s married a Han girl, and his family insisted, like many other Hui families, that the girl visit a mosque and proclaim the faith in Islam under the lead of a male imam. Whether the girl "truly believed" no one knew, and the boy's family cared less about the felicity of the conversion than the success of the marriage. Mai hated such occasions. To him, these are merely nominal rituals which cheat no one, but no body, for reasons he equally deplores, would "pierce the thin veil (*tongpo chuanghuzhi*)" and reveal their purely deceptive and hollow formality. "The Hui

families want to keep face," he said, "They want the Han girl to convert. But they don't care whether she is sincere. You know what? She doesn't care either. She just comes, listens to our jibber jabber, reads whatever she has to, and then proceeds to her wedding."

The rite I witnessed did confirm Mai's denouncement. The Han girl looked puzzled when Imam Hai, a junior cleric dispatched by Mai, was teaching her the *shahāda* and the basic tenets ("five pillars") of Islam. She stared at Hai for about five minutes, then rolled her eyes, and pushed up the small cap that only covered the top portion of her hair, leaving the rest falling down from the sides. The cap (*libaimao*, or "the cap for prayer") was in fact often worn only by Hui men and was obviously grabbed in a hurry by the boy's family merely as an expedient for the superfluous yet necessary ritual. The boy's mother did not expect this ritual to be long (I heard that all the families were then waiting in the nearby restaurant for the wedding ceremony), and when Hai's sermon became tedious, she stood up and walked out. Then her son followed. The impatience of the Han girl surfaced on her face, and Hai had to wrap it up quickly. The rite ended minutes after the boy and his mother left the room.

"How could I continue?" Hai later complained to me. "The Hui themselves didn't want to hear. They didn't care whether their bride was a Muslim or not. They walked out first. How could you expect the girl to be sincere? It's a complete fraud." But Imam Zhu disagreed, "Isn't that how we the Hui originated in the first place? Our ancestors are Arab men. Our *shifu*s (master) were Muslims, but our *shimu*s ('wife of the master') were all Han. Aren't we in fact enacting the same thing?" Zhu's optimism soon shifted into a general claim on Hui identity: "We the Hui are Chinese Muslims. We are rooted in China

and we are every bit Chinese. Our *shimu*s were all Han! Our ancestors were foreigners, but we are not!"

His view was not contradicted. Both Mai and Hai shared it, however much they hated the nominal conversion rituals. Instead of refusing to preside over such rituals, Mai rather attempted painstakingly to perfect them. He put up a poster shortly afterwards in the mosque, announcing that all Hui families who wanted to take Han brides must send the girls to the mosque for a weekly course on Islam lasting for two months. "Otherwise," proclaimed the poster, "the imams will not preside over her conversion." Lodged firmly in the patrilineal line and speaking always to the Hui groom's family who "must send the (Han) girls to the mosque," Imam Mai's indignation resides in the (male) Hui's failure to properly assume their masculine position and convert the Han girls with their patriarchal power that was thought to lie at the fountainhead of Hui identity. Hui Islam is for him constitutively engendered, and the power of conversion is reinforced by that of the patriarch. He has monopoly over the ritual field, and he merely wants the Han girl to consent to his symbolic hegemony.

But the patriarch is not always on Mai's side, and Hui Islam is not always at the "receiving" end of an essentially asymmetrical exchange of women that structures the imaginary of these clerics. One of Mai's daily obligations as a Hui imam involves leading *Janāza* prayers for deceased Hui whose families send the corpses to the mosque where they are properly cleansed, wrapped, and then carried to the graveyard for ritualized burial. Because Down is one of the only two mosques that could still perform this ritual ablution in the old city of Zhengzhou, it is not uncommon that two or more bodies need to be washed on the same day and one single *Janāza* prayer is simultaneously conducted

for all in order to shorten as much as possible the time between death and burial. Completely legal according to Islamic jurisprudence, this practice might nonetheless come up against particularly vehement resistance when the rite itself is subjected to disputed interpretations. On one such occasion, two unrelated Hui bodies – one male, the other female – were laid in Down, properly processed and awaiting their *Janāza* prayers. As usual, Mai suggested one, instead of two, *Janāza*. The man's family agreed immediately, while the woman's family protested almost as soon. The particularly intense sentiment and stubborn insistence of her husband shocked Mai. "I have been doing this for a long time, and it's been done this way from time immemorial," he told me, "so why did he object?" Mai tried all he could to convince the man of the legality and appropriateness of this combination in *sharī'a*. He quoted the Quran, the *Ḥadīth*, and all the relevant legal commentaries he had learned and could relate at that moment. Yet, all his efforts were in vain – the man persisted and grew increasingly impatient. "It was as if he would not allow this unless over his own dead body," Mai recalled.

Somehow mysteriously, as if an epiphany all of a sudden dawned upon Mai – he did not tell me and could not remember how this happened – he realized that this man, the surviving husband of the Hui woman whose body now laid wrapped in the mosque waiting for her *Janāza*, was a Han. "So the woman married a Han man! No wonder!" Mai scoffed. But the drama did not end with this realization and could not be contained by this reproach. The major reason behind the man's resistance was not his lack of knowledge. He did not protest because he did not know what was about to happen. He protested because he thought he knew all too well what would be performed by Imam Mai or what would necessarily ensue from his ritual performance. He thought Mai would

marry the two deceased in *yincao difu* (“dark afterlife,” the conception of the hereafter in Han popular religious traditions). He thought *Janāza* was no different from other “similar” rituals in Han popular religions where the death ritual, when conducted for a man and a woman collectively, is meanwhile a wedding ceremony. As a man, he could not allow this to happen. He could not allow his woman to be married to another man right under his nose – especially not in the eternal afterlife. He protested for his monopoly over the woman. It was not Imam Mai as much as the dead Hui man whom he took to be his archenemy in the struggle to keep his woman.

Mai was furious, and desperate. For some reason, he could not convince the man to accept his interpretation of *Janāza*. The more he spoke, the more what he said appeared suspicious and powerless – the seemingly endless proliferation of words merely revealed their fatal hollowness. The man simply would not listen – he heard, but did not listen, and would not listen. He insisted upon his own interpretation – to him, that was not an interpretation. That was fact, pure and simple. The factualization of his interpretation stems from the deep anxiety about the loss of one’s masculinity by losing the woman through whom one’s masculinity is mediated. Mai was no longer able to monopolize the ritual field. He was dislodged and exiled from his authoritative position. “So the woman married a Han man! No wonder!” Indeed, no wonder. Reluctantly, Mai was identified (instead of choosing to identify) with the matrilineal line, the line that gives women without receiving in return. He was relocated on the other side of the asymmetrical exchange and was deprived of the phallus. His interpretation became merely that, an interpretation, and a questionable one at that, pushed to the side by a “fact” that commanded the power of the apparently invincible patriarch. The man did not listen to

Mai because he didn't have to, in the same way as Mai did not need to ask the Han girl what she thought of the two months' course on Islam she had to take in order to marry a Hui boy – supposing, of course, the young man's family bothers to take her to the mosque for a rite of conversion (again, it's the boy's family who takes the initiative). For a brief moment, Mai was given the position of the maternal voice to inhabit. And for a brief moment, he experienced what it meant to be heard but not listened to, as though his voice did not and could not reach an addressee. Mai did not dwell on his fury. "Allah knows all," he said, and then proceeded to design the two-month course.

Imam Zhu was not the only Hui who recapitulated the popular origin myth whenever the religious endogamy stipulated by Islam is threatened by Hui-Han marriages. According to both officially canonized ethno-history and popular narrative (the former largely refines the latter without fundamentally altering its inherently gendered structure), the Hui's ancestors moved to China primarily through two completely unrelated routes. Some – almost exclusively of Arab and Persian origins – travelled to China in the medieval Tang (618-970 A.D.) and Song (960-1279 A.D.) dynasties as maritime merchants who settled down in affluent port cities, concentrating in the so-called *fanfang*s ("*fang*s for foreigners," as most urban Chinese live in such *fang*s, them being special residential units enjoying limited administrative autonomy, with their own segregating walls and gates) that dotted the eastern coast of China. A *fanfang* populated by Muslims is said to be allowed to administer its *fang* affairs in accordance with the particular version of the *sharī'a* which its residents had grown used to. The Muslim *fangmin* ("people of the *fang*") were free to follow the particular Islamic legal school in which they had been trained and by which they had been governed in their own land. It is

said that the imam who presided over the central mosque in the *fang* often commanded much religious and secular power, as the two were not sharply distinguished. The same cleric who led the daily prayers might also act as the local *qāḍī* (judge) in adjudicating legal disputes. *Sharī'a* functioned less as a textualized legal "code" than a complex, dynamic and internally heterogeneous collection of jurisprudential judgments and practical advice that did not necessarily bear the non-negotiable and coercive power modern codified law often possesses.

The maritime route, however, is not the only one the Muslim ancestors of the Hui are thought to have taken. For some, it is not even the more important and profound of the two routes canonized in popular narratives. If the Arab and Persian Muslim merchants were thought to primarily reside in their confined urban quarters, the Central Asian Muslim warriors, conscripted by the Kublai Khan in his eastward conquest of the Chinese Song Dynasty in the 13th century, on the other hand, were considered to have truly spread Islam across the vast territory of China. The old saying that "the Hui spread everywhere under heaven during the [Mongolian] Yuan Dynasty (1206-1368 A.D.) (*yuandai huihui bian tianxia*)" still resonates with much affective power among the Hui with whom I spoke, and many cited the names of specific Hui villages – such as "*huihui ying* (the Hui-Hui Battalion)" to demonstrate the presumed truthfulness of this narrative. It is often said that the consequence of the triumph of the military expedition of the Mongolian cavalry was an enormous migration of Central Asian Muslims into every single part of China, concentrating particularly in the northwest. Efficient and tightly-knit military units were converted *en masse* and *en bloc* into rural agricultural production units, and co-existed

with the local Han and the Mongolian rulers who occupied the highest rung in the racialized scheme by means of which the Mongols secured their dominance.

To what extent these accounts are based upon "historical evidence" might be subjected to perpetual debate, as the "evidence" themselves would presuppose conditions of silencing that exclude certain voices from the regime of perception their language institutes. As a matter of fact, the voicing of history that surfaces in the two origin stories recounted above already shows its silencing mechanism in broad daylight. Both stories are structured by a specific libidinal economy constitutively engendered: both myths operate along the axis of a masculinist ideology, since it is always the *male* Muslim merchants and the *male* Muslim warriors who take center stage in the supposedly epic migration from the "Heavenly Square (*tianfang*, the mythological name for the place where Islam is presumed to have originated)" to China, the place that the Prophet advised his disciples to visit in the pursuit of knowledge – "Seek knowledge even as far as China." Both stories can be reduced to one singular origin myth that narrates a *penetration* of China by an army of all-male Muslims. And this myth does not terminate with this penetration – or perhaps more accurately, this penetration assumes a more substantive form as the popular narrative advances. It is said that the Muslim merchants and the Muslim warriors, settling down in China and taking China as their new home, married[2] the local Han women, and the Hui are descendants of these inter-ethnic marriages. "We the Hui have half of our blood from the Han," a Hui once told me.

[2] Note that it is a marriage relationship that figures prominently in this masculinist imaginary – even in the story that features the Muslim warriors, women are not portrayed merely as spoils of war captured and appropriated by the victor. The – perhaps unconscious – emphasis on marriage relationship and its particular institutional function in mending the wound of war and violence says much about the posture the Hui adopt vis-à-vis the Han majority.

But this "fusion of blood" is structurally asymmetrical and constitutively engendered: the Hui are always situated in the position that receives women from the Han, and the ethnicization of Islam – its "sinicization" into an Islam "native" to China – seems precisely to depend upon this non-reciprocal "exchange" of women, as if Islam as a form of being-in-the-world cannot be cathected and its value cannot be fully expressed unless channeled through the female body; as if, in other words, Hui Islam has to speak through the woman in order to acquire its unmistakably masculine voice. To be more Han than the Han and to claim the faith in Islam within this special ethnic dynamic is therefore to simultaneously assume this masculinist position and to be subjected to its structural exclusion of women. It is at this specific structural juncture where the question of gender emerges as a particularly critical point in analyzing the ethnic and religious imaginary of contemporary Hui that I would like to locate the arguments of this dissertation. It is also this irreducible structuring of sexual difference that distinguishes the ethnicization of Islam among the Hui from other forms of ethnicization that do not necessarily rely upon an imagined dissymmetrical exogamy for its operation. The specificity of the Hui and of Hui Islam – instead of a generalized "Islam" abstracted from concrete social worlds – therefore requires me to situate the dual construction of ethnicity and religion within the more general framework of the (re)production of sexual difference.

The anthropological study of the production of sexual difference has a long history, one fraught with both disquieting quarrels and productive debates that go far beyond the confined concerns of this dissertation. One might perhaps even argue that the dispute on sex – and the constellation of concepts that cluster around it, kinship and gender being two – constitutes *the* major dispute in 20th century anthropology (Malinowski, 1962, 1927;

Lévi-Strauss, 1969, 1971; Rubin, 1975; Reiter, 1975; MacCormack & Strathern, 1980; Strathern, 1988; Schneider, 1984; Sahlins, 2013). The masculinist imaginary of the Hui substantiates, in a completely different context and under completely different historical conditions, the classical – and classically masculinist – myth of Lévi-Strauss's structuralist argument: that the exchange of women is the *sole* medium by means of which the institution of the social can be accomplished (Lévi-Strauss, 1969). For Lévi-Strauss, the formation of sociality *necessarily* presupposes the objectification of women – women must be numbed and their voice(s) must be rendered inaudible, so that society itself can be possible in the first place. For the Hui, Islam cannot become world-able – that they cannot world Islam – unless when it is cast in a dissymmetrical exchange that procures women. For Lévi-Strauss, (male) society speaks and can only speak through silenced women. For the Hui, (male) Islam can be inhabited and is inhabitable only by consigning women to the site of the unsignifiable. For Lévi-Strauss, the exchange of women is the primary exchange that organizes all other exchanges which are merely subsidiary and secondary. Woman is not one object among others but *the* object through which all other objects are integrated into the social world. For the Hui, the acquisition of women is the definitive moment in the formation of their ethnicity and the foundational condition for the "nativization" of their Islam – they do not become "native" Chinese until "half of our blood" comes from the Han women. It is neither co-habitation nor the appropriation of the Han language as much as the infusion of the female "blood" that is seen as the mark of a specifically Chinese Huiness. If Lévi-Strauss's structuralist understanding of kinship, incest taboo, and sociality in general constitutes *the* patriarchal myth as it poses male-dominated society as the only one possible and imaginable for the

human world, the Hui's worlding of Islam demonstrates in a particular historical context the power this myth still commands among some people.

But my interest lies not merely in showing that the Hui unconsciously subscribe to the same patriarchal myth that Lévi-Strauss consciously articulates. The feminist critique since the 1970s, especially in its French iteration, has already revealed the constricting masculinist ideology that drives both Lévi-Straussian structuralism and Freudian psychoanalysis (Irigaray, 1985a, 1985b; Cixous, Cohen, & Cohen, 1976; Wittig, 1992, 1985; Kofman, 1985). The searing political debate on feminine sexuality both emblazoned Lacanian psychoanalysis in the 1970s and prompted, among other factors, the ultimate dissolution of the Lacanian school (Mitchell, 1982, 2000; Rose, 1982). Irigaray, among others, argues in a Lacanian vein that in a libidinal economy structured by male dominance, women are necessarily located at the site where the acquisition of signifier is structurally precluded. Women are not subjects as much as they are objects, and they do not speak as much as they are spoken of. They form the very substrate upon which (male) speech becomes possible in the first place (Irigaray, 1985b, 1985a). Deriving less from theoretical feminism than from concrete feminist political struggles in a wide array of domains in the US, Catherine MacKinnon similarly argues that in a society dominated by male power, female sexuality in and of itself *is* a violation of women. Violence is intrinsic to the very *being* of women in a masculinist society (MacKinnon, 1982). Applying this radical feminist argument to the specific – specific yet particularly acute with its irreplaceable provocative force – case of rape, MacKinnon strategically reformulates the question "What is the violation of rape?" with "What is the

nonviolation of intercourse" (MacKinnon, 1983, pp. 646-7)?[3] Gayle Rubin's classical 1975 essay, in fact, already extends the feminist critique of structuralism and psychoanalysis beyond the scope of a narrowly defined "feminism." Rubin is not merely interested in how women are silenced and objectified – objectified yet rendered into signs that convey a message imposed from outside; she also reveals that both Lévi-Strauss and Freud (at least some of Freud's writings – for instance, his famous case history of Dora) have to presuppose a heterosexual norm in order for their respective argument to hold. A certain tendency toward "queerness" can already be discerned in this early essay: the objectification of women and subjectification of men in a masculine society and the theory that poses this society as the only one possible are not merely oppressive to women; they are oppressive to all human. It is, in other words, the normalization of sexuality and the regimentation of sexual difference according to the heterosexual norm that should be questioned and dismantled. The feminist project is not to liberate women as much as to revolutionize the organization of sexual difference and to work for a new politics of sexuality (Rubin, 1975; see also Rubin, 1984). The masculinist imaginary of the Hui, therefore, is predicated not merely upon the silencing of women. The ethnicization of Islam among the Hui equally presupposes a heterosexual norm. Although Islamic religious doctrines might have indeed lent some theological and moral support to heteronorm, these operations of normalization are overdetermined among the Hui by this specific mechanism of ethnicization.

[3] Though I agree with Catherine MacKinnon's feminist critique, it does seem that the feminist mobilization sometimes tends to shift into a movement seeking state censorship against certain forms of sexual variance and produces subsequently its own form of exclusion and violence. It is therefore critical to distinguish between different senses of "the public" and not to conflate politics with state intervention. For a sophisticated disambiguation of "the public" as a concept, see Warner, 2002. For an application of this analysis to queer politics and ethics, see Warner, 2000. Gayle Rubin's recent article on the background to her famous "Thinking Sex" essay provides ample information on the late 1970s and early 1980s feminist "sex wars." See Rubin, 2011.

The meaning of this overdetermination can be further elaborated. In Foucault's now canonical *History of Sexuality Vol.1*, he distinguishes what he terms the "deployment of sexuality" from the "deployment of alliance" which he attributes to an earlier historical period of the West.[4] Instead of being marked by abstinence and "repression" of sexuality, the modern West, according to Foucault, is characterized by an explosive proliferation of discourses on sexuality and a complete re-organization of the sexual landscape. Homosexuality, for instance, is no longer attached to certain acts but becomes a marker of identity – homosexuals become a new "species" under the transformed historical condition. On the one hand, psychoanalysis is part and parcel of this historical shift specific to the modern West and contributes to the proliferation of sexual discourses and identities. The "talking cure" itself, according to Foucault, is both a process for transforming sex into words and an occasion that in its own turn produces sexual pleasure. At the site of sexuality, the classical Foucauldian doublet – power-knowledge – is complicated by the transformative addition of a third term, that of pleasure. Psychoanalysis not only produces "truth" about sex; it also produces pleasure in the course of its loquacious interpretation. On the other hand, Foucault considers the psychoanalytic focus on the structural function of incest taboo and sexual prohibition as a "defense" against the rising deployment of sexuality. He sees both psychoanalysis and Lévi-Straussian structuralism as a stubborn insistence on the deployment of alliance and a resistance to the historical shifts in the trinity of power-knowledge-pleasure –

[4] According to Foucault, by the time of his writing, the deployment of alliance had yet to recede into historical obsolescence. However, he does seem to subscribe to a certain teleological point of view: "It is not exact to say that the deployment of sexuality supplanted the deployment of alliance. One can imagine that one day it will have replaced it. But as things stand at present, while it does tend to cover up the deployment of alliance, it has neither obliterated the latter nor rendered it useless. Moreover, historically it was around and on the basis of the deployment of alliance that the deployment of sexuality was constructed" (Foucault, 1978, pp. 107).

> If for more than a century the West has displayed such a strong interest in the prohibition of incest, if more or less by common accord it has been seen as a social universal and one of the points through which every society is obliged to pass on the way to becoming a culture, perhaps this is because it was found to be a means of self-defense, not against an incestuous desire, but against the expansion and the implications of this deployment of sexuality which had been set up, but which, among its many benefits, had the disadvantage of ignoring the laws and judicial forms of alliance. By asserting that all societies without exception, and consequently our own, were subject to this rule of rules, one guaranteed that this deployment of sexuality, whose strange effects were beginning to be felt – among them, the affective intensification of the family space – would not be able to escape from the grand and ancient system of alliance. Thus the law would be secure, even in the new mechanics of power.
>
> (Foucault, 1978, pp. 109)

One cannot ignore the historical specificity that conditions Foucault's argument and to which his argument is primarily addressed. The shift from alliance to sexuality is specific to modern Western societies, and it does not follow that the expansion of colonial power necessarily entails the proliferation of sexuality and the gradual displacement of alliance by sexuality in the colonized or semi-colonized societies – in fact, Foucault has not attended to the possibly colonial conditions that underpin the apparently "Western" transformation of sex (Stoler, 2002, 1995). We can ask, in the context of this dissertation, whether a similar story of the rise of the deployment of sexuality can be charted in contemporary China and whether, consequently, the ethnicization of Islam among the Hui and the masculinist imaginary that subtends it constitute a local mechanism – certainly one among many – that "defends" against the emerging deployment of sexuality. In other words, does the ethnicization of Islam among contemporary Hui inadvertently play into a much larger historical shift in the Chinese sexual landscape? Does being a Hui

constitute a way to subject one's sexuality to the rule of the "law?"[5] What is the relationship between ethnicity and sexuality as is embodied particularly by the Hui?

Instead of providing a direct answer to these difficult questions, this dissertation is oriented in the direction pointed by them and situates itself in relation to these critical concerns. The kind of recognition sought by the Hui and expressed in their imaginary reception of the Han women is overdetermined by the (re)production of sexual difference. It is not the Chinese state as much as an abstract and monolithic – hence fantasized – "Han people" that constitute the imaginary subject from whom such recognition is requested. And the recognition demanded cannot be subsumed under the liberal claim to "equal rights" but comes close to the Hegelian conception of recognition. To have what the other wants but can never have and to imagine oneself as possessing that which the other desires yet can never acquire is to request a kind of recognition that locates one at the site of the master. In a society dominated by male power, both the master *and* the slave are men. The slave is not silenced as much as prompted to speak, and to speak in order to give his recognition to his master. It is a male voice that is extorted as a

[5] Though I accept Foucault's historical argument, I nonetheless find his conception of power insufficient for thinking about the imbrication of subjectivity and sociality with sexuality. It is one thing to argue that there is a history to sexuality, and kinship relations and organizations ("families"), among others, have undergone tremendous shifts in the past several centuries both in the West and elsewhere. It is quite a different matter to argue that incest taboo is the only social form prohibition could assume and that the production of sexual difference can occur without the operation of a foundational prohibition. Perhaps a radical politics of sexuality that celebrates the transformative power of sexual variance is not necessarily incommensurable with a psychoanalytically informed analysis of the limited set of structural positions in the social production of sexual difference. The point, I think, is not to ask whether prohibition is necessary for the formation of the constitutively sexual subject; it is rather to question if a radically new re-distribution of the unsignifiable is possible. In other words, if the division between subject and object is a necessity for the institution of the sexual social, it does not necessarily follow that both cannot be embodied by the same individual, either successively or perhaps even simultaneously (then both temporality and sociality have to be radically re-thought). It is in this sense that I think a contemporary reworking of psychoanalysis and its feminist critique might constitute a way of theorizing "queerness" alternative to the theory of performativity. For a psychoanalytic critique of Foucault, see Copjec, 1994. For the queer theory of performance, see Butler, 1993, 1990, 2004. For recent theories on queer temporalities, see Freeman, 2010. For an early critical review of the performance theory of gender and sexuality, see Morris, 1995.

consequence of the master-slave dialectic, and the maternal voice is no less excluded from the position of subjection than from that of subjectification.[6] The master considers himself to be the site where the truth of the slave is located. He is not the slave yet bears that which the slave desires; he is different from the slave only to the extent that he sees himself to be what the slave would ultimately want to become. The dialectic between master and slave therefore is an identity-in-difference. It is precisely this (masculine) dialectical differential that marks the ethno-religious imaginary of the Hui (men) and characterizes their self-location vis-à-vis the Han (men).

In this dissertation, no chapters are devoted exclusively to a study of Hui Muslim women (or the Han women who "marry into" the families of Hui men). Instead, the problematic of gender looms large and surfaces at particular points in the progression of my ethnographic narration: in chapter one where modern historiographical works on Hui ethnicity written primarily by Hui intellectuals are critically addressed side by side with the popular narratives that form their backdrop, from which they draw their historical commonsense, and in which one could discover a somewhat mysterious connection between the figure of the Han woman and the Dao of Islam; in chapter three where the figure of a Han woman is located at a critical juncture in the modern genealogical and religious imaginary of Jahriyya Sufi Hui, to the point where her importance manifests precisely in her exclusion and marginalization; and in chapter four where I discuss

[6] Though Judith Butler clearly knows that the position of women is excluded from the master-slave dialectic (e.g. "In post-Hegelian terms, she [the woman] is 'cancelled' but not 'preserved.'"), she occasionally slips into the contrary view. While discussing the Lacanian conception of the symbolic order, for instance, she argues that "The Symbolic order creates cultural intelligibility through the mutually exclusive positions of 'having' the Phallus (the position of men) and 'being' the Phallus (the paradoxical position of women). The interdependency of these positions recalls the Hegelian structure of failed reciprocity between master and slave, in particular, the unexpected dependency of the master on the slave in order to establish his own identity through reflection" (Butler, 1990, pp. 56-7).

women's mosques and whether the existence of female imams indeed constitutes an indication of women's agency in the world of Hui Islam. In all instances, I attempt to locate the question of gender in a structural(ist) analysis without reducing the difference of gender to the difference of "woman," and without replacing my analysis with an empirical interest in letting "women" speak. Not all women's voices are necessarily the maternal voice, as I shall try to demonstrate in the course of my analysis (especially in chapter three), and a concern with the "empirical" women, with their voices and their specific discourses, nonetheless should not absolve one from a more careful structural analysis. In this dissertation, the exclusion of the maternal voice is seen as constitutive of the formation of the male-centered Hui ethno-religious imaginary. It is this structural function of gender that I shall try to show at various points in my ethnographic analysis.

Ethnicity, Difference, Socialism

The proximity of the Hui to the Han and the attachment of the Hui to a China defined largely in Han terms have long been noted by Western anthropologists. Dru Gladney, in his rich ethnography of the Hui, calls them "Muslim Chinese," to deliberately emphasize a critical point which he insists upon against those who argue that the Hui are not and do not consider themselves to be "Chinese:" that the Hui, being Muslims, nonetheless imagine themselves to be an intrinsic part of China (Gladney, 2004, 1998a, 1998b, 1991, 1987). Keeping a distance from the Han and constantly denouncing the latter as "unclean" and "idolatrous," they nonetheless think that the Han are an "internal other," someone neither me nor completely non-me. The Hui speak the Han language (a common name for Chinese is *hanyu*, "language of the Han"), and despite the intermixing of certain Arabic and Persian transliterations largely confined within religious and ritual contexts,

the Hui do not speak a separate ethnic language. Jonathan Lipman calls the Hui "Sino-Muslims," particularly to emphasize this linguistic dimension (Lipman, 1997).

Western missionaries in the early twentieth century often had a somewhat ambivalent attitude towards the Hui, much the result of the often confusing and contradictory characters the numerous Hui they encountered on their travel presented to them. On the one hand, compared to the Han whose practice of ancestor-worship and popular religions often earned them the name of "polytheists," the Hui were seen as a distinct group whose monotheistic belief rendered them particularly amenable to the Christian message. On the other, however, the very closeness of the Hui to the Han in their language, ethnicity, and even some apparently syncretic ritual practices (e.g. donning Han-styled mourning garments during funerary rites), also shrank their critical distance from the Han so much desired by the missionaries: the Hui must be seen as different enough so as to become the kind of subject most open to the good news.

Samuel Zwemer (1867-1952 A.D.), the prominent American missionary nicknamed "the Apostle to Islam," traveled to China twice in his life. The first time was in 1917, in the middle of his term in Egypt as an instructor in the theological seminary of the Arabian Mission and Cairo Study Center. He traveled to Shanghai to see his sister, Nellie Zwemer, who was at the time serving her own mission in China. Zwemer met Isaac Mason – a British missionary of the Quaker Friends' Foreign Mission who had lived in West China for over twenty years by this time – on this trip and inspired the latter to focus his missionary activities on Muslims in China. But Zwemer's interest in China's Muslims, particularly the Hui, dated to long before this short encounter. Seven years earlier, in 1910, while preparing for the World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh, Zwemer was

in the same commission (Commission I) with Marshall Broomhall, to whose work *Islam in China: A Neglected Problem*, published in the same year, Zwemer contributed a short preface with other members of Commission I, according to whom "[T]he accessible Moslem population of China is larger than the Moslem population of Egypt, Persia, or Arabia; and yet practically nothing has been done for them….The critical hour is at hand when Moslem mission in China must be faced, and specialists set to work to win this great neglected class for the Christ" (Broomhall, 1910, pp. ix-x).

Isaac Mason, the British Quaker missionary that Zwemer inspired on his 1917 trip, published a series of works on the Hui from the late 1910s till the end of the 1920s (Liu & Mason, 1921; Mason, 1928a, 1928b, 1922; Mason, Committee, & Moslems, 1919). One work, *List of Chinese-Moslem Terms*, was so popular as to have to go through numerous re-printings in order to meet the large demands of those missionaries intent on preaching Christianity to the Hui. The recognition that in order for proselytization to progress smoothly and effectively among the Hui Arabic and Persian as two major languages of Islam were hardly sufficient and that one needed to learn how critical Islamic terms were transliterated and translated into the Han language was widely shared among Western missionaries. Sixteen years after his first trip, in 1933, when Zwemer visited China for the second time and hiked with his son-in-law, Claude L. Pickens, Jr., into the high mountains of Northwest China, he had to grapple with this linguistic difficulty on his own: he tried to communicate with the Hui in Arabic, even reciting certain Quranic verses. These certainly won him warm welcome, admiration and respect

among the Hui, but he was nonetheless disappointed that the Hui could not speak Arabic – their Quranic recitation, unfortunately, proved largely unintelligible to him.[7]

But the so-called "sinicization" of the Hui is by no means limited to the linguistic domain, and it often puzzled the missionaries as to how two apparently incompatible belief systems – Islamic and Han Chinese (both were essentialized and homogenized) – could sometimes function simultaneously in the world of the Hui, supplementing instead of contradicting each other. G. Findlay Andrew, another Protestant missionary of the China Inland Mission, recounted numerous instances which he thought proved that although the Hui "have obtained quite a number of converts from among the Chinese through the medium of force and persecution, as well as by the practice of taking Chinese wives and concubines [the missionary here is following the colloquial story, and the taking of women is here seen to supplement brutal violence and the act of war]…they have undoubtedly lost through these practices some of their personality and religious fervor" (Andrew, 1921, pp. 65). He proceeded to substantiate this proposition with concrete examples: "One young Hwei-hwei [Hui] visiting our Mission station at Sining for medical attention, was so unfortunate as to have his three animals stolen. Without hesitation he went to heathen temple of the City God to cast lots which he hoped would lead to the discovery of the thief and the recovery of the stolen animals. Another, visiting the same place, had a Moslem charm around his neck, but finding this failed to cure his ailment he applied to a Taoist priest, who supplied him with a fresh one consisting of one bean and a few grains of barley bound in a red cloth of triangular shape…" (Ibid., pp. 65)

[7] See a series of reports published in 1933 on the missionary journal *Friends of Moslems: the quarterly newsletter of the Society of Friends of the Moslems in China*. This newsletter was based in Hankou and under the auspices of China Inland Mission.

The list went on, and at one point, there was even a case when a Hui master burned incenses and paper money to appease the disgruntled spirit of his dead servant, despite the fact that he had already conducted for him a proper Islamic funerary rite (Ibid., pp. 66).

All these are not unknown among the Hui. The anxiety of complete "sinicization" haunts many I have come to know in my work and prompts still more to resort to a quasi-racial discourse that attempts to solidify the vague line which supposedly separates the Hui from the Han. "As a Hui, you might forget your religion for a moment, but the seeds planted in your heart never die. The religion is in your blood. Sooner or later, you will find your root." I was once told by a young Hui who "did not become a real Muslim until I read the history of our ethnic group." Exotic physical features constitute a constant (and very often the first) topic in many conversations I participated in, and the significance of a long and carefully tended beard far exceeds the meaning given to it in the Islamic religious tradition. The racialization of Hui identity can in part be seen in how the beard is fetishized among the Hui, and how this fetishization produces unanticipated yet critical consequences which reveal the contradictions intrinsic to this racialization.

Imam Mai, whose sex joke was recounted above, had been thinking about cultivating a beard for a long time. He was a locally renowned imam, one of the vice-presidents of Henan Islamic Association, and recognized by the state with a political position in the Provincial CPPCC (Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference). He didn't have a beard, though. He tried multiple times, and once he even promised to his God in one of his prayers that he would – however difficult it may be – cultivate one, tend to it carefully, and clean it daily when he performed his ritual ablution. But he could not. Or perhaps

more precisely, his body could not. He abstained from shaving for several weeks, and then what he had was a messy moustache and sparse hair under his chin – none of the kind it was often expected a Hui could grow. Once cornered by Imam Hai, his junior and assistant in the mosque, on why he did not keep his promise with God, he blushed, turned away his face, and mumbled, "well…it doesn't look good…" "And God will interrogate you (*nawen*) when the Day comes!" Hai giggled over his joke. But Mai did not at all find it funny. "I can't," Mai later told me, "I just cannot."

The point is not simply to grow a beard, but to grow a particular kind of beard that looks exotic and foreign. And Mai's incapacity to grow such a beard and his reluctance to acknowledge it highlight the specific form many Hui prefer to imagine their difference: one cannot *will* to grow this particular kind of beard, because "real" difference does not and cannot exist by will. "Real" difference manifests itself only at a level beyond intentional intervention. The body of the Hui is mystified, given a depth, and placed squarely at the center in the imagination of difference, as though religious difference – a kind of difference presumed to be based upon voluntary and conscious pronouncement of faith – can only be realized and secured in a space where it is "objectified" and "factualized" in physical terms, where Islam is built into the body and manifests itself in the latter's ability to grow an exotic beard *in spite of* the will of the man who possesses it (or does he still possess the body?). Dru Gladney also notes the iconic character of the beard in bodying forth the difference of the Hui: "Upon one's first arrival in a Hui village or home, the locals frequently bring out the individual with the largest nose, longest beard, fullest eyebrows, most extended earlobes, and say : 'Look at this guy, he's a real Hui!'" (Gladney, 1991, pp. 24) The irony is that one has to painstakingly look for a "real Hui"

who is different from all other Hui simply because he alone is seen to be able to body forth an authentic Hui-ness which no one else possesses. The example made to stand in for the type acquires its exemplariness precisely because it does not belong to the group to which it stands as a representative.

To be sure, this racialization of difference through the fetishization of bodily features is strongly male-centered. Only men are seen and offered to be seen, presented to a gaze that tries painstakingly to recognize a difference often difficult to perceive. It is the patrilineal line that is thought to have preserved the racial purity of the Hui and the religious piety that is "planted" in the blood that flows from father to son, mediated by the necessary yet secondary role of the (Han) woman. As will be shown in chapters one, three and four, there is a specific structural connection between the figure of the woman and the position the Han are assigned to occupy in the dominant imaginary of the Hui, to the point where even a Hui woman would be situated in a position of religious *and* ethnic impurity (as they are inextricably linked among the Hui). She's not given to be seen not merely because women are supposed to be confined within the intimate and dark chamber of the family. Her subtraction from the visible world is also due to the imaginary position given her to inhabit which renders her unworthy to be seen, since it is presumed that the "authentic" difference does not reside in her. She is seen as the hinge that links "foreign Islam" to the native land of the Han, and the ethnicization and indigenization ("sinicization") of Hui Islam in China take place *through* her and *by means of* her. She is not and cannot become "pure." The presumed "impurity" of women is the very condition for the Hui both to acknowledge their "Chineseness" (this Chineseness is almost

synonymous with Han-ness) and to sustain a certain distinct ethnicity that reifies their religious difference from the Han.

The sociocultural and religious sectarian diversity among the Hui have been well documented in a variety of anthropological and historical accounts, and this diversity might not come as a surprise given the Hui's wide distribution across the immense territory of China and the vast differences in local socio-economic and ethnic dynamics (Dillon, 2009, 1999, 1996; Ben-Dor Benite, 2005; Israeli, 2002, 1980; Wang, 1996; Caffrey, 2008; Fan, 2001; Atwill, 2006). An urban Hui in Henan would surely differ from a rural Sufi Hui in Ningxia, and a Hui cadre in Beijing would also differ from a Hui imam in Yunnan. This dissertation does not profess to describe a highly simplified and homogenized Hui world which does not exist ethnographically. Neither does it claim to introduce the reader to all the diversities among the Hui. It is not and does not intend to be a general introduction to the Hui, but attempts to ethnographically describe and analyze the complex mechanisms and politics by which an ethnicized Hui Islam is defined – by the Hui and by the Chinese state – and governed. I try to move between ethnographically rooted descriptions and structurally informed analysis that unfolds at a level slightly removed from the empirical plane. Different chapters give different weight to the religious and the ethnic sides of the story, but the intertwinement of both runs throughout the dissertation. My main point is not merely that they cannot be separated when we subject the Hui to the analytical gaze – a point already well known. I would like rather to examine why and how they cannot be separated, and the institutional and symbolic conditions that both produce and are produced by this entwinement.

One side of the story this dissertation attempts to narrate and analyze is how the entanglement of Islam and ethnicity is imagined and formulated among the Hui, and how an ethnicized Hui Islam acquires its social, symbolic, and material traction within the Chinese Han-centered world. The other side of the story is how the intervention of the Communist state inflects and even transforms the form of this entwinement and its consequences. The official classification and categorization of ethnic minorities by the newly established People's Republic in the 1950s is often seen as a story similar to other modern state efforts (either colonial, postcolonial, or non-colonial) that attempt to build official governance upon the basis of politically driven ethnographic knowledge (Mullaney, 2011). The specificity of the socialist nature of this classification is mentioned and occasionally addressed as a carry-over from the political practice of the Soviet Union, but seldom is the question asked as to why – perhaps for the Soviet Union as well as for Communist China – *so much* weight is given to ethnic difference, and how this socialist politics of ethnicity differs from the now dominant liberal international legal framework that takes its cue from the Wilsonian principle of self-determination, transformed by the enormously influential decolonization movements in the 1950s and 1960s. Walker Connor summarizes what he considers are the classical Leninist principles on the so-called "national question," which have profound consequences for the Soviet Union's governance of its multinational citizen subjects:

> Pared down, then, to its basic elements, Lenin's strategy for harnessing nationalism is reducible to three commandments:
>
> 1. Prior to the assumption of power, promise to all national groups the right of self-determination (expressly including the right of secession), while proffering national equality to those who wish to remain within the state.

> 2. Following the assumption of power, terminate the fact – though not necessarily the fiction – of a right to secession, and begin the lengthy process of assimilation via the dialectical route of territorial autonomy, for all compact national groups.
>
> 3. Keep the party centralized and free of all nationalist proclivities.
>
> (Connor, 1984, pp. 38)

According to Connor, national self-determination in the socialist tradition is predicated upon a basic premise: that as a bourgeois ideology derived fundamentally from the capitalist economic condition, nationalism will necessarily wither away with the transformation of the mode of economic production, and granting all national minorities the rights to self-determination and national equality is merely an intermediary step to exorcise the historically residual national and ethnic resentments and a preparation for the ultimate fading of all nationalistic consciousness. National and ethnic differences are emphasized merely to produce the condition for eventual "assimilation" – hence the "dialectical route" of territorial autonomy.

The paradoxical consequence of this "dialectical route" is now well-known. The moment of "sublation" appeared to have been permanently postponed, and ethnic consciousness in the Soviet Union, instead of gradually subsiding and being replaced by a non-ethnic proletarian consciousness, merely strengthened. The reason for this strengthening differs across different ethnic groups, partly a result of the differential mediation of the same preferential treatments by different local ethnic and economic dynamics. The SU continued to divide its population into two broad and traditional categories – eastern and western nationalities – on the basis of "developmental" level, and the preferences given to the Ukrainians, Georgians, Armenians, Jew, and Germans were mapped onto historical and political conditions drastically different from those in

Central Asia (Martin, 2001; see also Brubaker, 1996). No China's minorities can rival the Ukrainians in their sheer number and percentage in the total Soviet population, and no ethnic groups in China have such a strong cadre of experienced national communists as the Ukrainians once had in the Soviet Union.

For some Chinese sociologists and ethnologists, the eventual political break-up of both the Soviet Union and the former Yugoslavia is due precisely to the failure of the Leninist dialectic. Ma Rong, a prominent sociologist of ethnicity based in Peking University, has over the past two decades been a devout propagator of what he calls the "de-politicization (*qu zhengzhihua*)" of the ethnic question in China (Ma, 2001, 2004; R. Ma, 2007, 2010b, 2010a, 2010c; Ma, 2012b, 2012a, 2012c). Initially published in the 1990s, his view gradually acquired traction in the 2000s among the top echelon of the CCP, as a sense of political urgency after the violent ethnic clashes in Xinjiang and Tibet pushed them to reconsider their long-term ethnic policy. The language Ma speaks – that of possible political turmoil and territorial disintegration were the ethnic issue not properly addressed – plays into the worst fear of the Chinese ruling power and helps spread his view across the political spectrum. To Ma, the systematic preferences extended to ethnic minorities, including but not limited to ethnic regional autonomy, appointment of ethnic cadres, and affirmative action in the domain of education and economic development, both create the situation of reverse discrimination (hence consigning the Han majority to a secondary and disadvantaged position) and reinforce ethnic consciousness by coupling economic and political benefits with ethnic identities. He does not, however, argue that the state should abolish all economic aids to ethnic minorities – it is not *whether* preferences should be given as much as in what *name* should the

preferences be given that he finds most important. He proposes that state funds for poverty relief should be distributed not along ethnic lines but alone lines of economic deprivation – so that both the impoverished minorities and the impoverished Han can receive what they need, and the gap between those well-to-do minorities and their relatively poor Han neighbors would not widen as a result of ethnic preference. Even where the division of wealth might trace the line of ethnic difference, Ma argues, the distribution of welfare should nonetheless take economic indicators instead of ethnic identities as its preliminary criteria. The point, in other words, is to render ethnic identity utterly irrelevant and reduce the question completely to one of economic redistribution.[8]

What Ma Rong means by "de-politicization" is a privatization ("culturalization" in his own term) of ethnic difference and its exclusion from both public policy and public discourse. To Ma, the presence of "ethnic talk" in public discourse is a redundant nuisance and political landmine: the relief of economic inequality can be accomplished and the life of ethnic minorities improved without a public political acknowledgement of ethnic difference, and this acknowledgement, conversely, merely aggravates ethnic consciousness without actually conducing to the alleviation of poverty and inequality. The kind of political society Ma envisions is not merely one in which "reverse discrimination" is a thing of the past; it also includes a classically liberal public/private division according to which ethnic difference is confined within the private while a unified "Chinese nation (*zhonghua minzu*)" alone is allowed in the public political sphere. To be sure, this supposedly "political" nation speaks Chinese, since for Ma Rong, Chinese is "by accident" the language spoken by modernity in contemporary China, and

[8] For a general review of the debates provoked by Ma Rong's argument, see Leibold, 2013.

ethnic minorities must learn Chinese in order to be "competitive" in the job market. Multilingualism is seen as intrinsically contradictory to the formation of a political community and necessarily disruptive to the operation of the capitalist market ("development," furthermore, is a goal rarely questioned – ethnic minorities either perish or learn to "adapt").

Ma Rong is not the only Chinese intellectual advocating for a unified "Chinese nation." A more nuanced – yet still ambiguous – view is offered by Wang Hui, the leading Chinese intellectual in the "New Left" who is based in the prestigious Tsinghua University. His view of the socialist legacy – especially ethnic regional autonomy – is diametrically opposed to that of Ma. Instead of suggesting its complete dismantlement, he proposes that it provides a particularly intriguing model which, if perfected, can lead to the formation of what he calls a "tran-systemic society" in China (Wang, 2011, 2010). According to Wang, ethnic regional autonomy – particularly its Chinese iteration which is essentially different from its Soviet "original" – does not address ethnic difference by carving out territorial space along ethnic lines. To the contrary, it necessarily includes a multiplicity of ethnic groups within the same region and is designed precisely to facilitate inter-ethnic social and economic exchanges. The purpose of this early socialist institution is not to segregate minorities into ethnic enclaves but to create the socio-economic conditions upon which an inter-ethnic social world can gradually take shape. By "trans-systemic society," he means a society in which ethnic difference is not privatized as much as publicized in such a way that each ethnic "system" both penetrates and is penetrated by all other systems. The "mutual penetration (*xianghu shentou*)" presupposes the existence of a public political sphere where difference is not reduced as much as

foregrounded. For Ma Rong, the issue of paramount importance is the weakening of ethnic consciousness and the rectification of "reverse discrimination," and his main focus is on the alleviation of economic inequality while ethnic difference is privatized and strictly excluded from public politics. For Wang Hui, on the contrary, the acknowledgement of ethnic difference in the public sphere and the mutual penetration of different ethnic "systems" through "public communication (*gonggong jiaowang*)" (hence not confined to the economic domain) are the precondition for the formation of the "Chinese nation." He does not advocate for the privatization of difference; neither does he subscribe to an essentialist view of ethnic identity. At the heart of Wang Hui's argument is a strongly Habermasian ideal of public communication:

> Public communication means not merely the dialogue and exchange between different ethnic groups and cultures; it also means unencumbered communication within each ethnic group. Without the latter condition, the politics of acknowledgement[9] will easily degenerate into a process through which the powerful few manipulate ethnic politics. Therefore, in order for "multiplicity (*duoyuan xing*)" not to be the basis for secessionist ethno-nationalism but the precondition for co-existence, we must activate an autonomous politics of communication both within each ethnic group and between different ethnic groups, without treating them as separate entities. In this sense, to acknowledge difference is not to perpetuate it, but to facilitate inter-ethnic exchange, co-existence, and integration on the basis of diversity and equality.
>
> (Wang, 2011, pp. 137-8)

All these, however, are idealized conceptions with heterogeneous ideological underpinnings: that there is such a thing as "unencumbered" and "autonomous"

[9] I have translated what Wang Hui calls *chengren de zhengzhi* as "politics of acknowledgement" instead of "politics of recognition" which he explicitly borrows from Charles Taylor. This is due to the fact that Wang Hui has a highly decontextualized and personalized understanding of "politics of recognition" which is not necessarily what is meant by Taylor. For instance, Taylor's conception does not include the meaning of "mutual penetration." To a certain extent, however, Wang's apparent disagreement with Ma Rong may be seen as a reformulated expression of the difference between classical liberalism and liberal communitarianism detached from the Western context and grafted onto the politics of ethnicity in contemporary China. For Taloy's politics of recognition, see Taylor, 1992; Taylor & Gutmann, 1992.

communication that takes place in a transparent public space where relations of power are ideally excluded; that between "unencumbered communication" and "inter-ethnic…integration" there is necessarily a causal relationship and "secessionist ethno-nationalism," across different socio-economic contexts and in whatever form, is necessarily to be prevented. The political meaning of this "public communication" becomes particularly clear in Wang Hui's critique of "depoliticized politics" which he considers is a backlash of capitalist ideology after the fading of the socialist class politics. For him, a "depoliticized politics" overlooks the historical formation of "the Chinese people (*zhongguo renmin*)" in the course of modern anti-colonial movement and socialist revolution. This newly formed "Chinese people" is intrinsically multi-ethnic, and its integrity and solidarity are derived less from cultural homogenization than from the common revolutionary experience. This means that the new "Chinese people" is necessarily mediated by class politics, and it was – at least according to Wang Hui – the ethnic "proletarians" and "oppressed masses" who had engaged in "public communication" with their Han comrades in the course of the revolution that was seen to emancipate all equally.

Wang cites Tibet as one particularly important example to buttress this argument. The relationship between the CCP and Tibet is cast in terms of social emancipation: Tibetan serfs were liberated from the yoke of serfdom and their livelihood completely transformed by the radical shifts in the social relations of production. This was supposed to have produced among ordinary Tibetans a strong sense of solidary with the CCP and a staunch support for the Maoist regime. Wang deliberately distinguishes between two forms of "secularization" that to him have entailed completely different – even

diametrically opposed – political consequences: on the one hand, the socialist revolution, with its secular class struggle and its relentless separation of religion from politics, is considered to have produced among the Tibetans a new "general identity (*pubian shenfen*)" beyond their specific cultural identification. He defines this new "general identity" – supposed to be "political" in the sense of being abstract and devoid of particularity – in terms of a new "quasi-religious value system" which creates for the Tibetans a new form of unison between politics and faith. The cult of personality that centers upon Mao is taken by Wang to be an expression of the success of this "general identity." On the other hand, the reform era, with its dismantling of the socialist scheme (hence "de-politicization") and economic liberalization, has prompted the emergence of a different kind of secularization in which the absence of the "socialist value system" left a vacuum quickly re-filled by the rise of particularistic identity politics and the resurgence of Tibetan religious passion. If the socialist politics and class struggle had – at least according to Wang – produced a class-based "general identity" that overrode the particularity of the Tibetan culture, the liberalization and capitalization of the economy since the late 1970s have practically abolished this abstract political identity and lent support to segregating and particularistic identity politics.

But this socialist "general identity" – suppose it indeed had ever existed in Tibet – is hardly compatible with the vision of "trans-systemic society" initially proposed by Wang Hui. It is not "mutual penetration" of difference as much as the overriding of difference by an apparently abstract political status – or an alternative unison of politics and theology – that is celebrated by him. The only difference between his view and that of Ma Rong seems to lie in the specific name in which they think difference can be

justifiably excluded: for Ma Rong, it is in the name of a liberal political public that ethnic difference should be privatized; for Wang Hui, it is in the name of a socialist proletarian "general identity" that ethnic difference should be rendered irrelevant. Paradoxically, though Wang appears initially to argue for the publicization of ethnic difference, he eventually arrives at a conclusion not distant from the privatization thesis Ma Rong insists upon. He speaks of "mutual penetration," but he never speaks of general multilingualism in national education (e.g. the promotion of the Uyghur language or Tibetan to the status of an optional second language in school curriculum nationwide) and political deliberation (e.g. in the national congress). The apparent radicality of his vision is merely contradicted by the conservativeness of his example and the interpretation he provides of it.

I trace the arguments of Ma Rong and Wang Hui not merely because they are the two most influential voices in contemporary China on the politics of ethnicity. What I find critical is a hidden commonality shared by both, though they offer apparently contradictory solutions: both are against identity politics, and both propose to offer possible political alternatives according to which ethnic difference is subordinated to inter-ethnic exchange. Both attempt to stand in a "neutral" position untainted by particularistic ethnic concern, and both try to render ethnic difference governable by reducing the question to one of inter-ethnic relation. For Ma Rong, the privatization of difference and the eradication of redistribution along ethnic lines will clear the political obstacle to "ethnic fusion (*minzu ronghe*)" and strengthen a Chinese "national consciousness" beyond ethnic identification. Inter-ethnic marriage constitutes for Ma Rong a major factor in gauging the extent of this "fusion." Wang Hui, on the other hand,

seldom speaks of inter-ethnic marriage. His version of inter-ethnic relations is dominated by a politico-economic framework: he speaks of the organization of the regional economy and changes in modes of production, and how ethnic difference and inter-ethnic relations are embedded in the networks of economic circulation that cut across the boundaries of ethnic territories.

As will be seen in this dissertation (especially in chapter six), Wang Hui's view represents the apotheosis of a *biopolitical* logic that defines the socialist governance of ethnic difference. To subsume Wang Hui's view under this biopolitical regime is simultaneously to enquire into the potential relationship between this governance and the governance of sexuality under the late socialist condition. Though he does not speak explicitly of sexuality, the terms Wang adopts to describe the dynamic formation of "trans-systemic society" have strong sexual implications: ethnic "contact (*jiechu*), blending (*hunza*), alliance (*lianjie*), and fusion (*ronghe*)." Slightly beneath the analysis of economic circulation, there lurks the spectral figure of sex. The formation of the "Chinese nation" appears to be the result of the constant circulation between two interlinked economies: the political economy of production and the sexual economy of (re)production. The ultimate question would be, *What is the relationship between biopolitics and the organization of sexuality as manifested particularly in late socialist China's governance of ethnic difference?* Put differently, *Is there an intrinsic connection between the socialist politics of ethnicity and the socialist governance of sexuality?*[10]

[10] For discussions on the governance of sexuality in (post)socialist China, see Farquhar, 2002; Rofel, 2007, 1999.

It is within this specific conceptual field measured by the mutually complementary views of Ma Rong and Wang Hui that we can find the particular yet intriguing connection between the Hui and the politics of ethnic difference in contemporary China. To the Hui ethno-religious imaginary, "ethnic fusion" through "inter-ethnic marriage" is not a vision but a "fact;" "mutual penetration" is not a political program but the definitive moment in the ethno-historical narrative. The organization of inter-ethnic relations is *internal* to the Hui's self-imagination, and this internalization hinges precisely upon the normalization of sexuality according to the heteronormative and masculinist "deployment of alliance." Seen through the prism of the Hui, the theoretical and political limit of Wang Hui's Habermasian notion of "public communication" becomes particularly clear: there is no guarantee that this "communication" is not intrinsically bent by power relations and structured by specific symbolic orders. "Mutual penetration" could easily degenerate into a politics of sexual exclusion and ethnic discrimination.

China's socialist politics of ethnicity cannot be subsumed under the liberal framework not merely because of the reign of an authoritarian regime. As chapter five will demonstrate, ethnicity under the socialist condition is endowed with a special political publicity not present in liberal politics. The orthodox communist position on the ethnic issue – that the ethnic question can be reduced to class politics – prompted the early CCP to adopt a radical stance in the 1930s. The paradoxical consequence is that it is precisely because the ethnic question was considered *politically irrelevant* to socialism that it had been – and continues to be – *politicized* to such an extent as to have become the *touchtone* of socialist politics. This dialectical break between theoretical invisibility and political hyper-visibility is precisely the general dilemma that haunts contemporary

China's governance of ethnic difference. It is also within the general political field measured by this dialectic that I attempt to situate the arguments of this dissertation.

Outline of Chapters

This dissertation is divided into two parts, complemented by a short conclusion and an epilogue. Part I consists of four chapters. In chapter one, instead of providing a comprehensive historical introduction of the Hui, I conduct a critical reading of the historiographical narratives on Hui ethno-history proffered by Hui historians and intellectuals in the early twentieth century. I argue that the discourses formulated to buttress the view that the Hui constitutes a distinct ethnic group both presuppose and entail an imaginary predicated upon an exclusion that is at least two-fold: the exclusion of women and of Han Muslims. These two exclusions are not parallel to each other but entwined in a spiral topology, braided and one reinforcing the other in producing profound effects. A third exclusion which is situated at a different level but which results directly from the spiral entanglement of the woman figure and Han Muslim is the exclusion and marginalization of Uyghur Muslims, manifested in the portrayal of them in the Hui imaginary as "backward," "ignorant," and "savage." I discuss how this exclusionary imaginary is embedded in concrete political actions of the Hui intellectuals whose books and speeches were and still are widely read and circulated among the Hui.

Chapter two is based upon my fieldwork in the city of Zhengzhou, provincial capital of Henan Province. My main focus is on how urban mosques and the residential structure of *fang* function to produce the institutional conditions by means of which Hui Islam takes root in the local social world. I discuss how state laws and administrative

regulations transform the institutional structure of the mosque by legally reifying the pre-existing yet largely informal distinction between the clerical and the lay power that used to complement each other in mosque management. This reification entails the rise of the localized secular "commission for the democratic management of the mosque" (*qingzhensi minzhu guanli weiyuanhui*, or *siguanhui*, as it is often shorthanded) and the displacement by this secular institution of clerical power in the domain of the mosque. I locate this displacement in the larger urban (and to a lesser extent rural) socio-economic context that directly influences the material condition upon which the building and demolition of the mosque are predicated. Islam as a religion does not spread on its own, and its tenacity in the Chinese social world cannot depend exclusively upon the formulation of imaginaries. It is because of this that I focus in this chapter on the material anchor that fortifies the institutional existence of Hui Islam in the fast changing local world. This fortification cuts across ethnicity and religion, and renders the governance of the mosque into a form of territorially bound communal autonomy.

In chapter three, I turn to a different institutional form by virtue of which Hui Islam acquires traction in the Sino-centric world. The residential structure of *fang*, according to what I have observed in my fieldwork, exists almost in every Hui settlement, and its localized character is discussed in chapter two. Each *fang* closes in upon itself and is granted a certain (ethnic) autonomy by the local government. In contrast to this segmentation and localization of *fang*, I discuss in chapter three the trans-local and trans-*fang* institution of Hui Sufi order in northwest China, focusing more specifically on the Jahriyya order due to the fact that Jahriyya is particularly influential in Ningxia and its relative organizational strength compared to other orders renders it a good example in

examining the institutional existence of contemporary Hui Sufism. Although the distribution of Hui Sufism is not limited to northwest China, it is considerably less common compared to the prevalence of the institution of *fang* in Hui Islam. A Sufi *menhuan*, as Sufi order is specifically termed within the Chinese context, often controls more than one *fang*, and the localized "commission for the democratic management of the mosque" is often subjected to this trans-*fang* clerical control whose source of power lies ultimately in the hands of the *murshid*, the Sufi saint presumed to be a close and "secret" friend of God who possesses special power of intercession in the Hereafter. I unravel the logic of *murshid*-hood by concentrating on the function of secrecy and its various ramifications in the dual and entwined domain of genealogy and materiality. Secrecy produces a particularly strong organizational solidarity which enables the trans-local link that sustains the continual existence of a Sufi *menhuan*. I draw a distinction between the rule of the actually existing saints and the rule of abstract sainthood itself, and discuss the contrastive interpretations applied to each among the Hui Sufi. Gender comes up at particularly significant points in my analysis: the figure of the Han woman appears at the very site where the saintly genealogy risks irretrievable interruption and discontinuity, and her position is seen as both necessary and secondary. By means of her ethnic Han identity and her female position (both are inextricably intertwined – this constitutes a point of correspondence to the position assigned to the Han woman in the modern Hui historical narrative discussed in chapter one), she is able to function as a hinge that temporarily conserves the semen of sainthood and later passes it on to the subsequent male descendants. She is seen as the "reflection of the glaring light that emanates essentially from the man who conquers her" (Zhang, 1990, pp. 216).

Chapter four moves on to a different kind of trans-local network that exists among the Hui. I study in this chapter the world of Hui clerics: how they are trained, what kind of collegial relationship is established in the course of training, how this relationship influences both the spread of Islamic knowledge and the attainment of clerical positions, and how clerical position is marked by a mobile nature. I also focus on the economic situation of Hui clerics and how their basic sustenance, social insurance, and medical benefits are provided and by whom. I outline the legal and administrative space in which the clerics are implicated and the specific laws and regulations that unwittingly unchain them from the binding of local mosque commissions which hire them. I also compare female imams and male imams, and by discussing the particular symbolic ordering indexed by the dual term *shimu*/*shiniang*, I reveal the structural logic that organizes the exclusion of women in the Hui clerical world.

Chapter five is the short transitional chapter that opens Part II. In this chapter, I situate the contemporary dilemma of China's late socialist politics of ethnicity in the broader world of the Chinese communist movement from the 1920s onwards. I trace the theoretical and ideological vicissitudes in the communists' attitude to the ethnic question, and demonstrate the central paradox that it is the political irrelevance of ethnicity to the communist movement that has made the politics of ethnicity the cross the CCP has to bear in its long political journey. I hope to be able to show with concrete detail why it is critical not to reduce the itinerary of the ethnic question in the (late) socialist China to a liberal genealogy of self-determination, which perhaps has become the hegemonic political imaginary in theorizing and analyzing the politics of ethnicity after the Second World War and the decolonization movements.

Both chapters six and seven confront the socialist politics of ethnicity in a more direct manner. Although the arguments proposed therein are not specific to the Hui, the historiographical and ethnographic work conducted derives primarily from my study of the Hui and is necessarily limited by this basic parameter. In chapter six, by critically reading the communist archive, I trace the formulation of a major socialist political arrangement in the governance of ethnic difference, namely ethnic regional autonomy. Instead of adopting the commonplace view that the Chinese ethnic regional autonomy is merely a reiteration of its original in the Soviet Union, I argue that this "Chinese version" bears its own specific logic irreducible to both the classical socialist practice and to the liberal politics of redistribution and recognition. Neither self-determination nor the legal-juridical framework of individual or collective rights can fully account for the specificity of the Chinese variation of ethnic regional autonomy. On the one hand, I maintain that at particularly critical points, this regional autonomy takes on a decidedly biopolitical form and follows a biopolitical logic in its governance of ethnic difference. On the other, I also attend to the spectral character of the socialist politics of ethnicity as it manifests itself in the strangely tenacious power regional autonomy commands in the imaginary of the Hui, to the point where one cannot locate a "properly" ethnic question and the line which separates a question *involving* ethnic minorities and a "properly" ethnic question cannot be effectively sustained. A dispute on property relations involving ethnic minorities, for instance, could easily somersault into an ethnic issue, and the politics of ethnicity is invoked in order to stake claims that do not intrinsically pertain to ethnicity. I try not to completely reduce this pervasiveness of "the ethnic question" to the instrumentalist point of view (although instrumentalism is certainly present), since the ghostly grip on the

minorities of the spectral politics of ethnicity is empirically observable. More often than not, ethnic minorities themselves – here I can in fact only speak of the Hui whom I have studied – cannot draw a clear distinction between the question involving ethnic minorities and a "properly" ethnic question, for, if I am a Hui and my house has been razed to the ground just to clear the space for a lucrative housing project, should I not take this to be an "ethnic question" since I am indeed a member of the ethnic minorities and my livelihood has been gravely endangered?

In chapter seven, I study a different aspect of the socialist politics of ethnicity. Based upon my ethnographic work among the Hui cadres both in Zhengzhou and Ningxia, I examine in this chapter the institutional logic in the state appointment of ethnic cadres. In contrast to the ethnic deputies in the National Congress and the CPPCC who are often seen as puppets barely able to represent the interests of ethnic minorities to the state, ethnic cadres, given their more "direct" form of power in the administrative domain, are looked on as possessing "real" power. However, due to the basic constitutional premise that "the ethnic question" *had already been solved* by the time when socialism was first established and secured in China in the 1950s, the political representation of ethnic minorities is not mediated by a public sphere that can re-frame the parochial ethnic interests in universal terms exposed to public debate and recognized by all sides. The political representation by ethnic cadres therefore bears an internal paradox: the absence of the public sphere and the relocation of ethnic interests in the administrative domain create a short circuit and essentially privatize the political representation of ethnic minorities. This paradox manifests itself in the double-edged character "ethnic sentiments" assume in the regime of representation: on the one hand, the representative power of

ethnic cadres is seen by the Communist state to reside in their "ethnic sentiments," in the "natural bond" that supposedly connects them to "their own people." The immediacy of this "natural bond" is considered to guarantee that they are most capable of relaying the interests of their own ethnic group to the state. On the other, however, it is precisely the same "natural bond" that simultaneously silences the voice of ethnic cadres, since what they say would immediately be seen as a direct reflection of their unmediated and spontaneous "ethnic sentiments" by definition not based upon logical reasoning. The privatization of the political representation of ethnic minorities locates ethnic cadres in a position where speaking is structurally foreclosed. They cannot not betray what they are supposed to do, and the institutional position they are given to inhabit is itself an impossible position. It is this paradox which I attempt to unravel in chapter seven.

Part I

CHAPTER 1

Narratives of Exclusion: History, Ethnicity, Politics

A criticism one frequently comes across when going through Hui Muslim publications in the Republican period (1912-1949) pivots on the notion of the "state." It was often argued, by the Hui imams who could read and write Chinese and by a selective few young Hui intellectuals receiving education from modern colleges and universities, that the Hui Muslims in China – that is, the ordinary Hui who were different from them – did not have a clear idea of "state;" that they often confused "religion" and "state," to the extent that they took an imaginary land of the "Arabs" as their true "homeland" and denied outright that China was the "state" to which they had belonged and would continue to belong and in which they had become or were in the process of becoming modern citizens. To them, this fantasized political loyalty had made the ordinary Hui particularly resistant to sending their children for an education in Chinese, despite the fact that Chinese had long been the native language spoken among the Hui. In an article published in 1929 in the most prominent Hui journal in the Republican period, *Moonlight* (*Yuehua*), an author with the penname "Liu Zhou" (Six Continents) took upon himself a

rehearsal of this hackneyed critique. In his view, the major sickness of the Hui was two-fold: on the one hand, many Hui refused to send their children for an education in literary Chinese and thereby deprived their descendants of the opportunities of learning the language of "their own country" and absorbing the "high culture" (*gaoshang wenhua*) that came with this education. On the other, notwithstanding the efforts of a few "knowledgeable Hui," most ordinary Hui Muslims – the ones who were "insane" (*hunkui*) in Liu Zhou's opinion – continued to refuse to accept China as their "fatherland" and Chinese as their "native language," and continued to take Turkey and the "Arab countries" as their genuine home and Arabic as their mother tongue, despite the fact that Chinese was practically the language under daily use (Liu, 1929, pp. 2).

Liu Zhou's criticism was intended to waken the ordinary Hui from their "insanity" and to set them to face up to their most urgent political responsibility as citizens of the new Republic. He did not take time to question the essentialized and reified relationship established between Islam, Arabic, and the Arab in the imaginary of the Hui he criticized. Perhaps he himself was not exempt from this quite tenacious essentialization that was prevalent among the Hui, both the elites and the common poor. A homogenization of both Islam and "the Arab" was endemic in the Hui literature of this (and later) period. In an essay published in 1930 in the same journal, for instance, an eminent Hui intellectual professed to introduce to his readers "the Islamic culture," although what followed, in his own words, was exclusively "the Arab culture." The dual fact that Islam was far more complex and heterogeneous than the "Arab culture" and that the kind of "Arab culture" he hastened to present was by no means exclusively "Arabian" (e.g. the adoption of Greek philosophy into Islamic theology, the "House of Wisdom" in Baghdad, the

exquisite Persian literature, the groundbreaking contribution to Islamic learning made by the Muslim scholars in Al-Andalus, etc.) was merely overshadowed by his anxious desire to demonstrate the past grandiosity of the Islamic civilization (Li, 1930b, pp. 1).

But the gaze of the Hui elite intellectuals was fixed primarily inward and upon the still fledgling Republic of China. A particular saying, either openly criticized or implicitly attributed to those who were placed under criticism, haunted the writings of many of these Hui intellectuals: that the Hui should "fight only for [their] religion, and leave the state to whoever cares (*zhengjiao bu zhengguo*)." It was so paraphrased by another author who presented this saying to foreground his own critique, "It is the state of the infidels, not mine. So why do I have to fight to protect it?" (*bi waijiao de zhongguo yuwo hegan?*) (Ma, 1930, pp. 2)

Although it was often acknowledged that this saying had a long history among the Hui, no one who made this criticism seemed to know where and how it originated. Even the nuance and ambiguity of the expression are erased both by the paraphrasing above and by my own expedient English rendition. *Zhengjiao bu zhengguo* could in fact also have an entirely different meaning. Instead of portraying a population of disinterested, even inactive Hui, unconcerned with the invasion and occupation of China by Western colonial forces, it could also be taken to transmit a different message that had become almost completely illegible to some (by no means all) Hui intellectuals after the fall of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911): *zhengjiao bu zhengguo* could also be translated as "[we] fight only to preserve [our] religion, and not to take over [your] state." It could be re-located in a history of imperial suspicion by the ruling Manchus, violent state oppression, and enforced expropriations as a result of failed military revolts; it could be connected to

the successive and invariably defeated Hui rebellions in northwest and southwest China that spanned the entire period of the Manchu dynasty[11]. It could, in other words, be read as a defensive slogan, a message sent perhaps by Hui elites in order to anxiously pronounce their loyalty to the Qing court and to demonstrate their disinterest in the pursuit of political power. "What was the meaning of *zhengjiao bu zhengguo* [in imperial times]?" asked an essay published in *Huizu Qingnian* ("The Hui Youth") in 1934, and the author proceeded to provide an answer,

> If our faith was in danger, we would spare no effort in defending it against the perpetrator. But if it was a question of conquering the polity and snatching the throne (*zhengniantian zuohuangdi*), we the Hui would not participate – that was not what we wanted.
>
> (Xue, 1934, pp. 1)

This view was shared by Bai Chongxi (Omar), a prominent Hui military general in the Nationalist KMT whose unwavering political support of Hui Islam earned him long-lasting respect among Hui intellectuals despite the disrepute he later suffered in Communist propaganda: "After the devastation we the Hui have suffered at the hands of the Manchu Qing Dynasty, many of us are afflicted by a resistance to engage politics. As

[11] These rebellions do not share a common mode, nor a common purpose, and for most, only tenuous and disputable connections can be established between Islam and the oppressions. Some initially started as infightings among the Hui (in fact, many participants and protagonists were Salar Muslims). The successive revolts of the Jahriyya Sufi order in northwest China, for instance, started from a quarrel between Jahriyya Sufism and the older Khufiyya Sufism both on religious issues such as how *dhikr* should be performed (whether silently or loudly) and on organizational matters, as the younger Jahriyya was attracting more followers at the expense of the Khufiyya order. The Qing troops were brought in to quench the fight and to exterminate Jahriyya Sufism defined, with much intervention of the Khufiyya order, as a "heterodoxy" of the Hui religion that should be purged for the sake of local peace. The Hui revolts in Yunnan, for another example, had as much to do with local economic competition between and among the Hui and the Han in terms of the extraction of mineral resources as with ethnic conflicts that eventually invited state suppression. One could not, in other words, reduce them to a singular and uniform model of political rebellion intended to conquer the imperial polity or to realize some millenarian Islamic vision. There is an enormous amount of literature on almost every aspect of these complex movements. For Hui revolts in northwest China including but not limited to Gansu, Ningxia, and Qinghai, see Feng, Li, & Zhang, 1990; Zhang, 1990; Lipman, 1997, 1981; Bai, 1953; Gao, 1998; Li & Yu, 1988; Shao & Han, 1992; Wang, 1968. For Hui rebellions in southwest China, see Atwill, 2006; X. Ma, 2007, pp. 45-53; Wang, 1968.

a result, some of us have the conviction that we *zhengjiao bu zhengguo*. But this is wrong…" (Bai, 1943, pp. 3)

Still, we cannot be sure when, where, and how this ubiquitous saying originated. But the lack of this knowledge should not prevent us from pondering with caution the contrastive meanings given to it by two opposed readings situated in two completely different political contexts. A slogan presumed to result previously from a self-defensive gesture that attempted to preserve Islam by claiming political subjection was now seriously accused of buttressing the passivity and indifference of the Hui to the political destiny of an endangered China. It was thought that although *zhengjiao bu zhengguo* had been a strategy conducive to the precarious survival and periodic thriving of Hui Islam in the imperial times, it now stood in the way of the Hui's performing their new roles as actively engaged citizens of the new nation-state. Instead of closing in upon themselves as minorities only conditionally tolerated under the domination of a Manchu dynasty, the Hui should – in the eyes of the elite intellectuals – reach out to the broader world and let their voices be heard in the collective making of the new state. There was, in other words, nothing worse than indifference and apathy under such circumstance.

It is around this particular stance of the Hui intellectuals in the Republican period that I shall organize this chapter. These intellectuals were constantly on the watch and in the position of speaking out and to a general Han audience; they situated themselves not as a parochial minority confined either geographically or politically within their own world, but as a minority that was tightly bound up with the Han majority, even as an *internal* part of the latter, thinking *for* them, *in the place of* them, perhaps at times even *as* them. It was as if, paradoxically, the Hui were seen as an intrinsic part of a new China imagined

to belong primarily to the Han. It is this peculiar imaginary and its ramifications in the historical narratives and political actions of the Hui intellectuals that form one major theme of this chapter.

This means, first and foremost, that this chapter deals only with a fraction of the more general world of Hui Islam in the Republican period. This does not mean that the historiographical discourses and political positions of the Hui intellectuals formed a completely separate world detached from the life of ordinary Hui. As a matter of fact, many of these so-called elite intellectuals were deeply involved in the local Hui world and attempted, by means of writing and travelling, to intervene in the wider world of Hui Islam. Their historiographical narratives, buttressed by professional historical knowledge, were not telling a story considerably different from what was imagined in popular narratives. To a large extent, what they did came close to a crystallization that gave to the popular narratives their coherency and made them more convincing by providing whatever historical "evidence" might come handy. Neither should we underestimate the contemporary effects of these discourses and political positions. Their books are still read and recommended, and their politics still admired among many Hui whom I interviewed. For countless times, I was told to refer to "history" so as to learn more about the Hui, and the "history" to which I was referred was almost invariably these historiographical discourses laid down in the first half of the 20th century.

But the limit of what is subsequently discussed should nonetheless be emphasized. For even if the elite intellectuals might be seen as merely intervening to give popular narratives their coherency and relative accuracy, their intervention nonetheless moved in different directions. They grappled with the popular stories instead of merely

recapitulating them, and they made their own share of changes so as to lead the narratives in particular directions that closely followed their political concern. They built upon popular sayings and reworked them into canonized historiographical discourses which were then spread by print media and public speeches. It is arguable that these Hui intellectuals played the role of professional writers and speakers among the Hui: they monopolized the field of speaking and their voices were made by later Hui to stand in for the entire "Hui" taken as a group. Both readings of *zhengjiao bu zhengguo*, for instance, were proposed by Hui elite intellectuals. All voices that could be heard – i.e. recorded in publications and still in part legible to me the contemporary student of the Hui – belonged to those who were literate in Chinese, and who bothered to send their essays and comments to the publishers. The fact that the historical narratives from which this chapter develops much of its argument are in Chinese already partially determines whose voices would be audible and how those voices could become legible. To be sure, not all Hui were interested in constructing a coherent narrative on Hui history, and perhaps even fewer were interested in being included as modern "citizens" in the new Republic, as many other Han who were equally seen by Han activists as the "ignorant "subjects waiting to be "enlightened" by the truth of modern statehood. This certainly does not mean that they preferred to be excluded or they indeed thought of the imaginary "Arab land" as their "state" in the sense given to this word by the politically impassioned elite intellectuals. Their image could come to us only distorted by the criticism to which they had been subjected, and we could only surmise their positions – if they indeed had them – negatively through the words of those who professed to be their educators. In other words, what this chapter discusses cannot be presumed to represent any general viewpoint of

"the Hui." The conditions both of the speaking whose effects were recorded in print and the reading which proposes to decipher the message implicated therein might well limit what is reachable and what not, what is legible and worthy to be deciphered and what not. However much the voices presented in the following differ from each other, they nonetheless fall within an intellectual circle, an exclusive discursive field only some had access to and were qualified to enter.

To accentuate this point is also to foreground another crucial fact that subtends this chapter: only some Hui, because of the particular institutional positions they inhabit (e.g. as intellectuals educated in modern universities where they are surrounded by Han peers, or as eminent clerics traveling widely across the country and invited to deliver speeches to a general multi-ethnic audience for the purpose of introducing Hui Islam – to mention only two such positions), feel the compulsion to explain to others who the Hui are, why and how Hui Islam differs from Han popular religions, what belongs to "Islam proper" and what belongs to local Hui variations ("customs and folklores") that should be reformed, and what shall be done to lift the Hui masses out of their "ignorance" and political insensitivity. The anxiety to speak and to converse with a broader world is unevenly distributed among the Hui, and this uneven distribution might owe as much to the differential institutional positions different Hui inhabit as to the different environment (rural or urban, the density of Hui population, or the residential pattern according to which the local Hui and Han population is distributed) in which they are inscribed.

The emergence of modern print media has certainly reconfigured the structure of this uneven distribution. Both between 1912 and 1949 and after the Communist take-over, for instance, there had been an enormous number of cases of Hui protest – some particularly

vehement – that targeted "insults" of Muslims in popular readings and school textbooks that included Islam as a chapter on world history. What counted as "insult" was highly heterogeneous: it ranged from the explanation of the Islamic taboo against pork in terms of a totemic worshipping of the pig, to a secular chronological location of Islam as a religion established by Muhammad at a particular point in history (instead of a religion created by God at the same time he created the world). Some protests demanded that a judicious history of Islam be published, while others attempted and invariably failed to replace the (biased) secular teaching on Islam in the textbook with a presumably orthodox Muslim viewpoint. In 1930, a public letter addressed to the State Bureau of Education was published in *Moonlight*, accusing the Commercial Press – the leading press for publishing academic literature and school textbooks in China – of letting out "misleading" world history and geography textbooks used for junior high school. After insisting that Islam was not an exclusive and intolerant religion and attributing the stigmatization of Islam as violent militarism to Western imperial slander, the letter proceeded to provide what in its author's view was a "correct" presentation of the Islamic religion that should be used in public education: "The Hui religion, or Islam as it is called in Western history, was established at the time of Adam, the ancestor of all humanity. It was gradually forgotten, until the time of Muhammad…" (Yi, 1930, pp. 3)

Whether many of those who had been provoked into the occasionally fiery protests had read those "insulting" essays on their own remained a question. The spread of print media was not an indicator of an increase in popular literacy, and many of the Hui protestors might in fact only have *heard* such insults from those who either had read the articles themselves or heard it still from others. Furthermore, the anxiety to speak is not

necessarily the same as the desire to converse – to replace an "insult" with one's own viewpoint presupposes a gesture of speaking that locates the other purely in the position of listening. In the example above, it was not a conversation that was sought, but merely a unilateral imposition. The purpose was not so much to provoke public debates that lead in directions no one could foresee as to "educate" others into an "orthodox" view which was acceptable to oneself. In other words, not only was the anxiety (and the ability) to speak continued to be unevenly distributed despite the flourishing of the modern print media, there also existed more than one stance and more than one posture that could materialize the desire to speak – this desire could as well lead to a refusal to converse with the broader world.

Having foregrounded the complexity, heterogeneity and intrinsic limit of the discursive field discussed in the following, I shall lay out what I intend to explicate in this chapter. My interest in this chapter is two-fold: first, instead of providing a necessarily disputable history of the Hui, I engage in a critical reading of the historiographical discourse on Hui ethnicity crafted and canonized by Hui intellectuals from early to mid-20th century. The canonization of this discourse was abetted by the propaganda work of the rising Communist Party (CCP), which based its own argument on Hui ethnicity largely upon the narratives published in Hui journals, periodicals, and pamphlets, and whose interpretations of historical "evidences" fell much in line with those offered by Hui elite intellectuals. This discourse, as I shall try to demonstrate in the following pages, is organized by a sexual economy characterized by an imaginary dissymmetry in an exchange of woman: the Hui are always located on the side that accepts wives in a unilateral marriage that binds the Hui to the Han. This fantasized dissymmetry relates

directly to another imaginary that structures this discourse: that the Hui possess the truth, the genuine Dao, or the hope of political redemption that is much desired by the Han. The Hui are seen in this discourse as situated at the site where the desire of the Han is imagined to be located. This sexual economy at once effectuates two founding exclusions: on the one hand, by trying to argue that the Hui are not Han Muslim converts and Islam is a "special religion" that simultaneously entails an ethnicity, "Han Muslim" is rendered into a contradiction in terms. According to the logic of this discourse, one cannot become a "Han Muslim" without necessarily becoming an ethnic Hui.[12] The possibility that one could be a Han and a Muslim at one and the same time is from the outset foreclosed. This foreclosure paradoxically locates the Hui intellectuals at the very site of "Han Muslim," despite – or precisely *because of* – their verbal disavowal. On the other, because of the particular kind of relationship between the Hui and the Han organized by the dissymmetrical sexual exchange of woman, this discourse positions the Hui at a place *internal* to the Han majoritarian republic, and Hui Islam in this context is turned into something that is both Han and non-Han. This ambiguity entails an ambivalent attitude to the Uyghur Muslims manifested in this discourse. Sharing the same religion, Uyghur Muslims are nonetheless seen as "ignorant" and "backward" subjects easily duped by

[12] I might be criticized as deliberately making a distinction that to some scholars did not exist for the Hui at this time. Dru Gladney, for instance, argued that the name "Hui" in the Republican period was a generic religious term that designated all Muslims (Gladney, 1991, pp. 65-115; see also Gladney, 1998a; 1998b, 2004). In this context, a Han Muslim is immediately a Hui – but not an "ethnic Hui," only a "religious Hui." I agree with him on the wide usage of "Hui" in designating all varieties of Muslims in imperial and Republican China: Uyghur Muslims were called "*chantou* Hui" (turban Hui), Salar Muslims Salar Hui, Kazakh Muslims Kazakh Hui, etc. However, I think to reduce "Hui" merely to a religious marker and to argue, for instance, that when the Hui intellectuals were talking about Hui ethnicity they were *in fact* only thinking of a generic Muslim identity, might gloss over the critical ambivalence implicated in their discourse. I have chosen, perhaps somewhat arbitrarily, to take the discourse I study literally, and to probe what is meant or what might have been meant by "Hui ethnicity" differentiated from a "purely religious" identity defined in this discourse. It is also because of this that I would take caution against Gladney's assertion that Hui ethnicity is merely "invented" by the Communist state which imposes its scheme of ethnic classification upon previously interacting "co-religionists" (Gladney, 1991, pp. 17).

colonial powers and who therefore must be "enlightened" by the more "civilized" Hui closer to the "advanced" Han. Many Hui intellectuals professed to speak for Chinese Islam in general and freely expressed what they thought the future of the Uyghur Xinjiang should be, without for a moment bothering to listen to any Uyghur voice (and most, if not all, of them could not speak the Uyghur language). The exclusion of Uyghur Muslims strongly marks this discourse and the politics that goes with it.[13]

Second, in this chapter, I am also interested in how at the same time when these Hui ethno-historical narratives were crafted and debated in the print media, the same group of Hui intellectuals and clerics were also carrying their staunch commitment to the Chinese (Han) nationalistic cause into actual politics, both domestic and international. The attempt to argue that the Hui were not Han Muslims went alongside with a strong conviction, that were China to be defeated and colonized by the Western colonial powers, Hui Islam would necessarily lose the condition of its existence, and forced apostasy ("the West" was rendered tantamount to a militant and intolerant white Christianity – the Western racist and biased image of Islam was merely reversed and attributed to Christianity itself) would necessarily ensue. It was argued that the protection of Hui Islam and its continual flourishing in China urgently demanded that the Hui rise up and become responsible modern citizens for their own sake; that to persist with the old wisdom of *zhengjiao bu zhengguo* amounted to no less than engaging in an active complicity with the colonial powers against the good of the Hui religion itself. The struggle against

[13] By solely emphasizing the exclusion of Uyghur Muslims in this discourse, I run the risk of yet again excluding other even less visible Muslim minorities in China. I should therefore remind the readers that compared to Uyghur Muslims who received much attention because of Xinjiang's political significance in the early 20th century, other Muslim minorities – many of whom also live in Xinjiang or its surrounding areas – had largely been consigned to oblivion, or placed far at the margin of the visible field. We should not forget this critical point as we read how Uyghur Muslims were excluded or rendered inaudible by the Hui intellectual discourse discussed in this chapter.

colonialism and the imagination of a modern nation-state became in this context an integral part of the new religious reformation propounded by many Hui activist intellectuals. The particular kind of Pan-Islamism or global Islam envisioned and upheld by these Hui elites was very different from the nostalgia for a unified, politically centralized, and militarily invincible Islamic caliphate (one reason behind this, as we shall see, is the strong connection between Pan-Islamism and Pan-Turkism in this period). Few – if any – criticized the abolition of the caliph by Ataturk. Modern Turkey, as a matter of fact, was unreservedly celebrated as a successful political model worth emulating for the entire "Islamic world." The basic attitude among these Hui elites was that it was only modern statehood (no clear distinction was drawn between an Islamic state and a secular state with Muslim majority) that could save Islam from its doom in the hands of the Western imperial forces. Specifically for the Hui, this state was and could only be the modern Republic of China. In the same manner yet somewhat counterintuitively, these Hui thought in the 1940s that it was only the modern state of India that could be the political redemption of Indian Muslims. The establishment of an independent state of Pakistan, according to the dominant view among the Hui elites who observed from afar and attempted to intervene to help their Indian brothers, would inevitably play into the hands of British colonial power and subject Islam to the imperialist strategy of divide-and-conquer (Kin, 1943). For them, the most effective resistance to world capitalism was a transnational united front of all subjugated nations and races with Muslims at its core – the Hui, in this vision forming a particularly significant link that could connect world Muslims and the Chinese Han (seen by the Hui intellectuals as two major populations that constitute a considerable part of the entire

subjugated world), was situated in a special strategic position in the broader global struggle against Western colonial imperialism.

Ethnicity as Icon

Two stories that both feature an exchange relationship pervade the popular accounts given of the Hui history. One revolves around a royal dream: it was said that one night in the second year of *Zhenguan* (628 A.D., during the Chinese Tang Dynasty [618-970 A.D.]), the Taizong Emperor – later commemorated in the Chinese imperial history for his supposedly cosmopolitan ambition and open-minded acceptance of multi-ethnicity under his jurisdiction – had a curious dream. He dreamt of being attacked by a vicious monster. The image painted of the devil was ghastly: fire-red beard, charcoal-black face, an immense gaping mouth with sharp tusks projecting outward. Frightened and stunned, the emperor was rescued in the dream by a strange figure: a bearded man with sharp facial characters, wearing an exotic turban, and dressed in exquisite clothes. Somewhat curiously, he held in his hands a mysterious scroll that seemed to possess special magical power. The next morning when the emperor met his ministers for a regular meeting and shared his dream requesting an interpretation from his courtiers, one of them advised that according to his astrological observation and calculation, a sage – a "Hui King" – had been born in "the West" whose morality was "impeccable" and whose governance "commendable" – "His realm overflowed with riches and his troops were invincible (*guofu bingqiang*)" (Baoshantang, pp. 1). Of all lands under Heaven, the courtier continued, only "the West" could give birth to this "real man" (*zhenren*) who brought with him a sacred revelation that was the most auspicious of all words. If Taizong wanted to overcome the evil power of the haunting ghosts, he said, he must send for this "Hui

King," invite him to the Tang court for an exorcism, and treat him and his disciples with respect. The Taizong emperor heeded this suggestion and immediately sent an envoy to "the Western Dominion" (*xiyu*). According to the storyline, this initiated the very first official communication between the "Heavenly Realm" (*tianfang*) of the Prophet (the "Hui King") and the Chinese empire.

Different names have been given to this story whose variegated versions were first orally transmitted and then printed as flimsy pamphlets as the technology gradually evolved in the late imperial and Republican periods: one name being *Hui-Hui Yuanlai* (the origins of the Hui-Hui), another *Xilai Zongpu* (genealogy of the migration from the West). A third name, however, might be more indicative of the hidden message conveyed by the structure of exchange that runs through this story: *Tangwang Tandao* (the Tang emperor seeking Dao). The Hui, in other words, were portrayed as possessing the true Dao, the efficacious Dao, which was actively sought after by the people of "the East," and especially by the open-minded and somewhat anxious Chinese emperor. The story does not merely narrate a fantasized history of migration initiated by a "dream." It also reveals how those who narrated and passed off this story imagined themselves in the Sino-centric world: they were invited to this land to fulfill a royal obligation, and to spread a true Dao that could only come with them from "the West." Although numerically a minority, they nonetheless considered themselves far superior spiritually. Various print versions of the story (and all those which I have read and heard) spoke an unmistakably Confucian language and tried – sometimes in too direct a manner as to become self-defeating – to show that it was the teaching of the Hui – i.e. Islam – that had spoken the Confucian message in a much better and more coherent way, as if

Confucianism was teleologically realized by Muhammad and culminated in a "Western" teaching that both fulfilled its ethical mission and at one and the same time canceled the necessity of its continual existence. Islam was turned in this story into the apotheosis of Confucianism, and the truth of the (Han) other was re-located at the site of one's own being. The Hui became in this story not the descendants of foreign Muslim migrants as much as the spiritual mentors necessarily demanded by the intrinsic inadequacy of Confucianism in its aspiration to realize its own moral and ethical ambitions. This initial myth founded – again, only among those who narrated and believed – an imaginary mode of relationship that located the Hui *within* the Sino-centric world and as an *integral* part of its cosmological and ethical pursuit. To become the desire of the (Han) other – or to imagine oneself as possessing the object desired by the other – may be seen as the fundamental structure that organizes the libidinal economy that runs through this story.

The second story is no less – perhaps even more – dreamy than the actual dream thematized in the first. A different structure of exchange forms the backbone of its narrative. Compared to the first story, it was more diffused, less structured, and certainly lacking in details – which made it, paradoxically, rarely questioned (even resistant to questioning) by both Hui intellectuals and non-Hui historians and anthropologists. It was said that the Hui were descendants of a particular kind of marriage: the male Arab and Persian merchants who travelled to China in imperial times married local Han women, and the Hui were the offspring of this union. The gender asymmetry in this narrative of ethnic origin was barely hidden and much emphasized among those who upheld its historical truthfulness. The Hui's ancestors were situated invariably at the "receiving" end in the exchange of woman, and it was the female Han wives who in this story

converted the Arab and Persian merchants into "Chinese" and who, with the same stroke, "translated" Islam into the Sino-centric world. The figure of the Han woman was assigned a structural position that resembled a connector that functioned to link two masculinist patriarchal worlds. Her importance was marked, however, only by her blatant invisibility. In the beginning of this popular Hui history, there was always a woman figure, but this woman was always nebulous and portrayed invariably as a "wife," and even her shadow was barely recognizable either in the narrative of provenance constructed exclusively by male Hui intellectuals – as we shall see shortly – or in popular stories orally transmitted within a male-centered Hui world.

The historical narratives discussed in this chapter all professed to go beyond the above two stories which, certainly not denied, were nonetheless thought to be derived from legends and hearsay tainted by the inaccuracy and vulgarity often attributed to popular sayings. But the dual structure of exchange – the imagining of oneself as the object of the other's desire and the fantasized portrayal of oneself at the "receiving" end in a unilateral and asymmetrical exchange of woman – undergirds most, if not all, of the narratives of history I am interested in. It is critical, I think, that we mark the place of woman in this economy of desire, especially when the two storylines from which I have crystalized the dual structure converge at certain sites whose apparent insignificance might be thought precisely to be indexical of their irreducible importance. In one version of *Tangwang Tandao* which I have acquired in my fieldwork, it is the following sentence that ends the entire story,

> The Tang emperor sent three thousand troops to the Western Dominion in exchange for three Hui soldiers [who would accompany the Hui envoy

> and help them spread the Islamic teaching in China]. These Hui soldiers stayed in China and reproduced *ad infinitum* (*shengyu wuqiong*).
>
> (Baoshantang, pp. 11)

"[The male Hui soldiers] reproduced *ad infinitum*" – the figure of the woman is not even mentioned, let alone named. This is the particular kind of language whose more intellectual version we shall be dealing with in this chapter. It is perhaps only with a complete turn of mind and a hyper-sensitivity to the text that we may start to render visible the female figure submerged in the masculinist archive. We can continue to ask: What is that object which one possesses that is thought to be desired by the other? Why does it seem that the "true Dao" bear a special affinity to a figure of the Han woman? Why does it appear that possessing the other's woman and possessing a Dao desired by the other are inextricably intertwined? What is the relationship between the Islamic "Dao" and the figure of the Han woman as manifested in this last sentence of *Tangwang Tandao*? The question of "Hui ethnicity" and the particular relation Hui Islam has to the Sino-centric world cannot be critically addressed unless we keep constantly in mind the hidden yet ingrained itinerary of the figure of the Han woman that runs through the narratives on Hui history. The making of the Hui *Weltanschauung* seems to presuppose a specific sexual economy in which the woman is structurally muted.

The intellectuals' narration of Hui ethno-history in the Republican period was situated in a specific historical context and spoke to a "misconception" politically injurious in their view. Early on in the Republican period (1911-1949 in mainland China), the Nationalist Party (KMT), the ruling party established by Sun Yat-sen, subscribed to the view that the Chinese-speaking Hui, different from the Uyghur, were no more than Han converts to Islam. The politically correct view was that the only difference between

the Hui and the Han was the former's religious affiliation. According to the official point of view, the Hui were not and should not be seen as a *minzu*, whether in the sense of a nation, a nationality, an ethnic group, or a race.[14] Those who argued in favor of a *minzu* status for the Hui risked being accused at least of ignorance and at most of treacherous agitation intended to decompose the presumptively unified Han precisely at a time when nationalistic solidarity was urgently called for in the face of the onslaught of Western colonial powers. According to the orthodox view attributed to Sun Yat-sen, the new Chinese nation (*zhonghua minzu*), the nation that was still in the making and without which a modern, industrialized and powerful China could not emerge, consisted of five different ethnic groups: the Han, the Manchus, the Mongols, the Hui, and the Tibetans. But the obvious immediately becomes obscure the moment one starts to push further: even if the presumption that the Han is a unified and internally homogeneous group was relatively unquestioned in the Republican period,[15] the category "Hui" remained conspicuously problematic. Since Hui as a single word was often used with an additional marker to distinguish between different kinds of Hui (While *chantou* Hui [turban Hui] was the name of Uyghur Muslims and *sala* Hui the name of Salar Muslims, only the name Hui-Hui designated the Chinese-speaking Hui this dissertation is interested in.),

[14] The complexity of the term "minzu" and its historical translations and circulations (from Chinese to Japanese and then back) in China have been well studied in an enormous amount of academic literature. Its particular mutation in relation to the Soviet notion of *natsiia* undergirds the contemporary debate on the politics of ethnicity in China. See, for instance, Ma, 2004; Mullaney, 2011; Pan, 2009b, 2009a; Schein, 2000; Harrell, 1995, 2001a, 2001b; Litzinger, 2000; Mueggler, 2001; R. Ma, 2010a, 2010c. This might constitute a particularly interesting and politically significant case in terms of the so-called "translingual practice" in modern China theorized by Lydia Liu. See Liu, 1995.

[15] This simplified view has of course been questioned by recent scholarship in the field of critical historiographical studies. See, for example, Mullaney, 2012. For a specific ethnographic example that takes an ethnic group with the name of Qiang to question the homogenous view of the Han, see Wang, 2003. For a more general critique that predates and grounds this particularly anthropological insight, see Wang, 1977. For earlier work on the historical formation of the "Chinese nation," see Luo, 1953; Lv, 2008; Li, 1967.

who the Hui were that were thought to form a key component of the five founding ethnic groups remained vague if without further clarification.

Four years before his death, in 1921, Sun Yat-sen, in a lecture given to the central office of KMT, clarified in passing what he meant by "Hui" in his political scheme for the multi-ethnic Republic:

> As to the number of the five ethno-nationalities, the Tibetans are just around four to five million, the Mongols not even one million, the Manchus perhaps only several millions, and the followers of the Hui teaching [i.e. Islam], although of a big number, are mostly Han.
>
> (Sun, 1927[1921], pp. 2)

In other words, whoever the "Hui" designated in Sun Yat-sen's vision of the new China might be, it did not include the Chinese-speaking Hui-Hui. There were many who were followers of the Hui religion, and many, therefore, had "Hui" as a marker in their names, but the Hui-Hui were not considered as belonging to the "Hui" of the five major ethno-nationalities, and they were seen simply as Han converts to the Hui teaching. This deliberate exclusion of the Chinese-speaking Hui could in part be explained by the territorial imaginary that subtended Sun's ethnic differentiation. In the *Declaration of the Provisional President of Republic of China* that he delivered in 1912 minutes after he was sworn into office, Sun Yat-sen said after a short preface:

> The foundation of a country lies with its people. To unify the territories that belong to the Han, the Manchus, the Mongols, the Hui and the Tibetans into one single country, and to unify all of them into one single people – this is the unification of the whole nation.
>
> (Sun, 1912)

The Chinese original (合漢、滿、蒙、回、藏諸地為一國) established a much stronger connection between the ethnonyms and their respective territory, harking back more

particularly to the Qing dynastic tradition that named the Uyghur Xinjiang (East Turkistan) as *Hui-jiang*. The Hui land that Sun Tat-sen wanted to incorporate and unify into the new Republic was the territory thought to be occupied primarily by the Uyghur Muslims. It was, in other words, the paramount concern with territorial integrity that was the foremost consideration in Sun's mind (cf. Yao, 2004; Matsumoto, 2003; X. Ma, 2007).

But there was also an additional consideration that prevented Sun and his KMT from drawing a possible distinction between the Han and the Hui. On multiple occasions and even after his pronounced affirmation of the formal equality of all of China's ethnic groups under the pressure of the Comintern, Sun argued explicitly for an assimilationist Han nationalism, which, however, was slightly different from an unequivocally racist Han chauvinism reigning supreme among some Han intellectuals and revolutionaries in late Qing and early Republican period. He took the US as the quintessential modern nation-state and was clearly aware of the multitude of races and ethnic groups that resided within its borders. Sun was an enthusiastic advocate of the "melting pot" model which had, according to him, successfully created a new "American nation" whose centripetal force underwrote the extraordinary strength of the American state and its global power. In the same vein, Sun aspired to "melt" all five of China's ethnic groups into one single nation. But this "nation," however, was ambiguous from the outset and constantly vacillated between a new "Chinese nation" modeled on the exemplar of a politically defined "American nation" (in which the Han were merely one component and progressively de-centered), on the one hand, and an expanded "Han nation" that had assimilated all other four, on the other. He was not unaware that this inconsistency might

elicit harsh criticism from those who were unreservedly in favor of granting ethnic minorities unconditional political equality upon the basis of which alone – in their view – a new China could emerge and triumph over her enemies. As if to preempt this critique, Sun argued in his 1912 lecture:

> Someone might say that since we have been advocating for the equality of all five ethnic groups for quite some time now, if we start to talk solely of Han nationalism, shouldn't we be worried that the Manchus, the Mongols, the Hui and the Tibetans might become disgruntled? I don't think we should bother with that. Now the Manchus are practically the protectorate of the Japanese, the Mongols that of the Russians, and the Tibetans that of the British. These are all indications that they could not effectively defend themselves. At the end of the day, it would still be our Han who assume the responsibility of salvaging and reinvigorating them. I now propose a middle way: we take Han as the core, and let all other four be assimilated into us, join us, so that they at least have a chance to be part of an independent state. We replicate the US model and assimilate the Manchus, the Mongols, the Hui and the Tibetans into a single Chinese nation, and by means of this establish a modern nation-state. We will be another state that professes a certain Pan-nationalism, a replica of the US in the Eastern Hemisphere.
>
> (Sun, 1927[1921], pp. 3)

The logic that Sun followed was worth noting: his assimilationist view was not unconditional, nor based completely upon an unreserved presumption of the cultural superiority of Han civilization. To him, the four ethnic groups (curiously, the Turkic-speaking Uyghur Hui were missing from his list, although Xinjiang was no less under the threat of the Russians) were faced with two options: either they fared on their own until they necessarily fell into the hands of the imperialists and lost once and for all any chance for political independence, or they joined the Han, sought assimilation into the latter, so that they could become political citizens in the new Republic of China instead of colonial subjects under imperial domination. The possibility – which could easily be imagined by a reader from one of the ethnic groups – that in the new Republic of China the minorities

would be no less "subjugated" or "colonized" and no more independent than they would be under the rule of the British, the French, or the Russian colonial power did not seem to enter Sun's political imagination. To him, assimilation was a necessity for the good of the four ethnic groups themselves, since "they could not effectively defend themselves." If all four must by force of circumstance be assimilated into the Han in order to avoid the fate of enslavement – if, in other words, the Turkic-speaking Uyghur Hui would after all is said and done be eventually "melted" in the Han-centered Chinese nation, what was the point of reversing the timeline and driving a wedge between the Chinese-speaking Hui-Hui and the Han? The very logic that Sun followed foreclosed a thematization of the possible distinctions that might exist between the Hui and the Han – since all would become the Han, why bother with the Hui who, according to Sun Yat-sen, were obviously already Han, or perhaps had been Han all along?

It was not just Sun Yat-sen, a Han revolutionary for that matter, who saw the Chinese-speaking Hui as Han Muslims. Many influential Hui themselves subscribed to the same view. Bai Chongxi (Omar), a prominent KMT general and a pious Hui Muslim who threw his unconditional support behind the reformation of Islam in Republican China, believed firmly that the Hui were no more than Han converts to Islam, to the extent that he deliberately prioritized the word *Huijiao* (the Hui religion) over the more obscure *Huimin* (the Hui people/nation/ethnic group) in naming the civil organization established for garnering Hui support for the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945) (Bai, 1939, pp. 10). An enthusiastic patron and unfailing protector of the Hui ʿulamāʾ and a remarkable contributor to the political and economic well-being of the general Hui population, Bai's basic conviction as to the fundamentally religious character of Hui

identity nonetheless remained unshaken throughout the years. And he was not alone. Ma Hongkui, the valiant warlord that ruled over the fertile Ningxia Plain which later became the central area of the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region in Communist China, shared the same view. Ma even thought that the Hui and the Han descended from the same ancestor, the Yellow Emperor (*Huang Di*), i.e. the imaginary patriarch thought to have initiated the Han civilization and who aroused so much Han nationalistic sentiment in late Qing and early Republican period. In Ma's view, the Hui and the Han were different in the same way as a Han Catholic or a Han Protestant was different from a Han ancestor-worshipper (Fan, 1980, pp. 188-9). The presumptively religious character of Hui identity could hardly be stated in a more matter-of-fact way.

Both Bai Chongxi and Ma Hongkui were political elites deeply entrenched in the complex and multi-dimensional politics of the newly emergent and still fledgling Republic of China and both had high stakes in every public pronouncement that may potentially jeopardize their long-term career. One could perhaps surmise that their position regarding the Hui was determined largely, if not exclusively, by the strategic concern with polishing a political portfolio and securing KMT support for their military power. After all, Sun Yat-sen and his autocratic successor Chiang Kai-shek never for a moment questioned the principal evaluation that the Hui were merely Han Muslims (cf. Chiang, 1976). What might appear more curious in this context, therefore, is the fact that some independent Hui intellectuals and social activists, even those well trained in the traditional madrassa-style mosque education, shared the same view as well. Yin Boqing, among others (e.g. Da, 1937), argued staunchly that a conceptual differentiation between "religion" and "ethnicity (*minzu*)" be clearly drawn as the first step towards a

disambiguation of what he thought a grave confusion. Following an orthodox point of view still dominant in contemporary historical accounts given of the Hui (cf. Editorial Board on the Brief History of the Hui, 1978; Qiu, 1996), he did not deny that the Hui were primarily – though not exclusively (let's mark this ambiguity where the figure of the Han woman appears only evanescently at the margin, obliterated by a masculinist historical narrative that nonetheless and most importantly circles around the question of sexuality) – of non-Han origin. He still accepted, like many of his opponents, that the Hui's ancestors were either seafaring Arab and Persian merchants traveling to China in Tang (618-907 A.D.) and Song (960-1279 A.D.) Dynasties for commerce or Central Asian warriors who settled in China due to the mass eastward migration of Central Asian populations conscripted by the Mongols in their military conquest of the Song empire. His point of dispute resided less in this narrative of origin than its relevance for justifying a separate Hui ethnicity in the Republican period. Yin compared the Hui to both the Manchus and the Mongols:

> Since Ming Dynasty (1368-1644 A.D.), the Mongols who had settled all over China during the Yuan period (1206-1368 A.D.) had changed their names and mixed with others. Now they have been transformed so completely that their current descendants have almost forgotten their origin. They have been absorbed into the Han and become ultimately indistinguishable. Take the Manchus for another example: they entered the heartland of China only about a century ago, but now their language and physical feature are already the same as the Han….How could it ever happen that a small amount of people from the Western Dominion (*xiyuren*) could still remain what they were and keep their distinctions intact, after a thousand years of mixed residence alongside and among the Han?
>
> (Li & Feng, 1985, pp. 264)

Anxious to prove his point and motivated, like many of his Hui compatriots, by a strong (Han) nationalistic aspiration, Yin did not mind reducing the complex imperial history of

multi-ethnicity to a simplified linear story of sinicization. Departing from this Sino-centric perspective, Yin continued to wage polemical and at times aggressive objections to his opponents. If, as some had argued – which I will discuss shortly – it was Islam as a *religion* that had endowed the Hui with a distinct *ethnicity* then, Yin objected, why didn't we call the Han Christians the Jesus *minzu*, the Han Daoists the Daoist *minzu*, the Han Buddhists the Buddhist *minzu*? Furthermore, since the Mongols, the Tibetans and the Manchus were all followers of variations of Buddhism (–Yin's simplification and reduction obviously went beyond the Sino-centric linear narrative of sinicization, and his lack of accurate knowledge of the respective religious tradition of each ethnic group by no means held him from making sweeping generalizations.), why couldn't they, were such logic to establish itself, be considered to belong to the same "Buddhist *minzu*" as the Han Buddhists (Li & Feng, 1985, pp. 263)? Carrying the logic *ad absurdum*, Yin tried to demonstrate the ultimate untenablility of the proposition that the Hui were an ethnic group.

The editorial note that prefaced Yin's essay pointed to several other places where the same view had been put forth in passing, but nowhere, as the editor emphasized, was the argument so forcefully made as in Yin's essay (Li & Feng, 1985, pp. 262). We should note that it was not merely the point of dispute (whether the Hui could be seen as an ethnic group) that deserved attention. It was, perhaps more importantly, what was not questioned and therefore conserved and shared among the two opposing sides that should at least be given equal attention. Yin did not nail his argument to a historical genealogy – he accepted whole-heartedly the popular historical narrative that told a story of migration and asymmetrical affinal relations. The "small amount of people from the Western

Dominion" was a rehash of the male Hui soldiers who mythically initiated the history of the Hui in the story *Tangwang Tandao* – note that Yin did not cite any historical reference yet he presupposed that this was the truth no one would deny. This imaginary history was preserved and its founding force in organizing the hidden sexual economy of the Hui historical narrative left much unquestioned. Having re-affirmed this foundational imaginary, Yin based his objection primarily upon what he thought the Hui *had already become* by the time of his writing: he seemed to argue that even if one accepted the (partially) foreign origin of the Hui, this acknowledgement of *history* could by no means lead to an indisputable argument that the *contemporary* Hui had not become completely absorbed into the Han and the Hui teaching had not been reduced entirely to a "religion" that must be rigorously distinguished from "ethnicity."

We must read Yin's essay alongside the opposing arguments in order to grasp the critical point under dispute. These arguments, to be sure, did not resort to a racial discourse to buttress their proposition of a Hui ethnicity – the presumption that the racial origin of the Hui is heterogeneous and no singular racial "bloodline" could be imagined as running through the Hui history was equally accepted. No less accepted was the presumption – which we have seen prevailed in popular narratives – that the Han, primarily by means of asymmetrical marital relations, also constituted one major racial/ethnic source of the contemporary Hui. The insufficiency of a purely racial discourse in supporting the argument in favor of a Hui ethnicity was known from early on, and its blatant contradiction both to "history" and to popular imagination prevented it from gaining traction in the narratives of the Hui intellectuals. The point of dispute, precisely as Yin criticized, was whether or how Islam could be seen as a religion that

entailed ethnicity. The question, as should become clear subsequently, was more ambiguous and nuanced than a straightforward debate on the substantive ethnicity of the Hui.

One view that set itself against that of Yin Boqing was represented primarily by Jin Jitang, a self-taught Hui historian who made his name by writing one of the first histories of the Hui and spearheading modern Hui Islamic education with his *Muguang* ("Light of Muslim") Elementary School. In an essay written in 1936, he confronted Yin's argument explicitly: "Someone might ask: if those who believe in the Hui religion [Islam] constitute a Hui *minzu*, why are Buddhists not called Buddhist *minzu*, Confucians Confucian *minzu*, Daoists Daoist *minzu*, Christians Christian *minzu*? Why is it the case that only those who believe in the Hui religion are called Hui *minzu*?" (Li & Feng, 1985, pp. 248) The reply he proffered was hardly convincing: that Islam was not one religion among others but a "special religion" with particular characteristics that all other religions did not possess. In his opinion, Islam was not just a "religion," but also "an all-encompassing social institution" that attempted to organize the entire world of its followers: "…it's the social institution of Islam that elevates it above all other religions. It is because of this social dimension of Islam that Muslims can constitute a *minzu*, while the followers of other religions cannot" (Ibid., pp. 248).

Much of Jin's argument, especially his opinion on the "social dimension" of Islam, was derived, somewhat ironically, from a passage he retrieved from an obscure Chinese translation of Herbert George Wells' *The Outline of History*, published to feed the craving for modern Western knowledge among the general reading public in early 20th century China. Wells, a best-selling writer and later remembered for his enormously

popular science fictions (e.g. *The Time Machine*), could hardly be considered as apologetic of Islam and many of his views (e.g. that "[Muhammad] seems to have been a man compounded of very considerable vanity, greed, cunning, self-deception and quite sincere religious passion" (Wells, 1922, pp. 240) would probably not appeal to the pious Jin. Even the particular passage he cited – which, however, could not be found in the English original and might probably be apocryphal – was strangely misplaced and painted an ambivalent picture of Islam that could easily be exploited to level criticism against it: "Islam is not merely a religious revolution. It is also a social revolution. It revolutionizes all previous religions, and Muslims differ from all other religious practitioners in their faith, thinking, and interest. They keep intact their own organization wherever they go and separate themselves out from all others. They become conquerors when they are strong, and secretly maintain their distinction when they are conquered. Although one cannot always observe it on the surface, the possibility that they could mingle with others absolutely does not exist" (Ibid., pp. 248).

We do not know from which particular Chinese edition of Wells' book Jin retrieved this passage. He certainly did not check his book, and it might even be possible that he did not read the entire volume, but only excerpts that dealt specifically with Islam published in some obscure journal. Whatever the case, it is a noticeable fact that even the like of Jin acquired the knowledge of his own religion from translations of Western works, which, in many cases, were accused precisely as the source where slanders of Islam initially originated. A passage that could be read as a critique of Islam as an intolerant and narcissistic monotheism was used to buttress Jin's argument that Islam was a "special religion" with a "social institution" that organized Muslims into a separate

world. Somewhat ironically, a slander was almost completely carried over but recast in positive terms and slightly inflected to fit into a general proposition on the *minzu* status of Muslims. Jin's lack of knowledge, his highly biased view of other religions, and his self-centered view of Islam as *the* religion (which was also *not* a religion, at least not one among others) were paradoxically corroborated by the stereotypical treatment of Islam in the passage he cited – it may well be the case that Jin knew as little about European Christianity as the author of the text knew about Islam. But this irony also reveals a crucial fact: in Republican China, some – by no means all – of the modern historical and sociological narratives about Islam could only draw their references from the vocabulary and texts translated and introduced from the West, and many – again, not all – Hui intellectuals were themselves not entirely innocent from unknowingly spreading stereotypical understandings of Islam.

But the argument of Jin Jitang, shared by many who published in *Moonlight* (cf. Zhao, 1929; Ding, 1932), was not completely about the Hui in China. He argued that all Muslims the world over constituted a singular *minzu*. In his imaginary, there existed not merely a Hui *minzu*, but this Hui *minzu* was only a fraction of the broader Islamic *minzu* that included all Muslims. For him, it was precisely a shared *religion* that had produced a binding *ethnicity*, as if the latter was a natural sequel that necessarily followed from practicing the former: "The obligation that a follower of Islam obeys is not simply sincere belief. It is also a matter of closely following a set of stipulated acts and behaving accordingly. Prayer is such an example….The shared religious faith breeds a *minzu* consciousness; Muslims coalesce with each other and therefrom results the *minzu* sentiment, henceforth the *minzu* character. This is particular to Islam. Therefore, only

Muslims can constitute a *minzu*" (Li & Feng, 1985, pp. 249). Ethnicity followed so closely on the heels of religion in this proposition as if no logical justification – at least Jin did not offer any and did not even see the need to offer any – was necessary; as if, when religion was "shared," when it was actively upheld by a collective of interacting adherents, it necessarily exceeded its "proper" limit and acquired a power that could only be named in terms of an ethnicity; as if, furthermore, even the individual act of prayer and the pious performance of avowedly religious obligations contributed to the formation of an ethnicity. It seems that in the mind of Jin Jitang, every act that demonstrated belief and every individual or collective action that materialized and historicized the teaching of the Islamic religion were always already an indication of an Islamic ethnicity. The proposition that religion "breeds" (we should here mark the implication of historicity) ethnicity locates "belief" in a movement of temporalization – it is not belief as much as *believing* (and all the acts that both historically sustain and ontically concretize this temporality) that ultimately "breeds" an ethnicity. In order for his proposition to acquire the particular affective value and apparent incontrovertibility in his own mind, Jin had to assume, perhaps unknowingly, that an originary historicity always already inhered in the act of belief, which was the very condition for ethnicity to be rendered into the ultimate *realization* or *culmination* of the religious teaching of Islam. To those who accepted the truth value of Jin's proposition, ethnicity incidentally became the *icon* by means of which alone Islam could be known and seen in the actual historical world – it was from the concept of Islamic ethnicity that the Islamic religion obtained its *visibility*.

Jin's position could hardly be defended on the ground of historical evidence, and even a brief glimpse at the immense differences that existed among Muslims worldwide could

easily reveal its invalidity and expose the naiveté and ignorance of its advocator. But a critique waged primarily at the level of historical fact, however, could not fully defeat this position either. To the contrary, the fact of enormous empirical differences may well bolster and reinforce instead of contradict Jin's stance: an Islamic ethnicity that is the iconic representation of the Islamic religion does not necessarily have to presuppose a common substance shared by all Muslims. Ethnicity may be seen as an empty frame that circles a field in which the Islamic religion could become visible as a sign, but it does not necessarily determine to what this sign refers and what kind of interpretant – to use a Peircean term – it is supposed to entail. This certainly is not the direction in which Jin himself carried his own argument, but the particular logic that emerges in his text does not exclude this radical possibility.

This same logic, however, also reveals another latent paradox in Jin's argument: by proposing an Islamic ethnicity, it erases precisely the line it struggles to maintain between the Hui and the Han Muslims. This erasure is performed in a somewhat peculiar manner: for Jin, the Hui are not Han Muslims because one cannot become a Muslim without meanwhile assuming an Islamic ethnicity – in other words, there is no such a thing as a Han Muslim since Islam necessarily "breeds" an ethnicity and gives to the Han converts a distinct ethnic identity that differentiates them from non-Muslim Han. The proposition that the Hui are not Han Muslims is substantiated by an argument that completely denies the conceptual possibility that a Han Muslim could ever exist in the world.

There Is No Such a Thing as a Han Muslim

Although not all Hui intellectuals shared the same boldness in arguing for a global Islamic *minzu*, the self-serving and stereotypical view was nonetheless widely shared that Islam was a "special religion" different from all others; that only Islam included a "social dimension" which went far beyond a confined field of belief and reached out to all aspects of its followers' life. Even the Chinese Communists who struggled to acquire the political support of the Hui adopted this view whole-heartedly, despite – or precisely because of – their suspicious attitude towards any religion. The presumably "social" traction of Islam made the CCP Red Army particularly alert to its mobilizing force both as a potential threat and as a possible exploit.

From the outset, the Communists painstakingly distinguished themselves from the KMT in their position on the Hui. In contrast to the KMT who treated the Hui merely as Han Muslims, the Communists took a diametrically opposed view and did not hesitate to proclaim their unconditional acknowledgement of a separate Hui ethnicity. This unreserved pronouncement was a crucial part of a broader propaganda campaign that also included assisting the ordinary Hui in establishing independent self-governance, even at times their own "autonomous government (*zizhi zhengfu*)." All these were designed to polish the image of the Red Army in the eyes of the disturbed Hui peasants and intended to induce, if not active Hui support for their military operation, at least passive tolerance or silent complicity. To increase the force of their position and to demonize the KMT, the Communists argued that different from the Tibetans, the Mongols, the Uyghur and other ethnic minorities, the Hui were oppressed by the ethnocentric KMT in a more fundamental way: they were not even considered to be an ethnic group. If oppression,

prejudice and poverty were the common fate suffered by all ethnic minorities, as the argument goes, the Hui were also victims to a particular injustice: they suffered an existential annihilation because their entire history as an ethnic group was completely denied by the KMT. It was as if they, as an ethnic minority, had never existed in Chinese history. The Communists held that no graver violation could be committed to an ethnic group than subsuming their history completely under the history of the Han.

In *Hui-Hui Minzu Wenti* (The Ethnic Question of the Hui-Hui), a small but politically profound pamphlet published by the CCP in 1941 that became the backbone for constructing an officially sanctioned history of the Hui after 1949, it was argued that "Islam is not merely a religious belief. It also includes beneath a religious surface a system of social institutions and a body of customs and folklores. It is precisely because of this that Islam is intimately linked to the formation of the Hui as an ethnic group" (Commission on the Study of the Ethnic Question, 1980[1941], pp. 55). The book further specified why "social institutions, customs and folklores" could be seen as pertaining particularly to the ethnic – contra religious – identity of the Hui: "[Foreign Muslims] came to China with their own customs and folklores. But when they settled in China, these necessarily changed as the specific social conditions shifted with the evolution of Chinese history. This is the major factor that went into the making of Hui ethnicity. A second and minor factor has to do with the new characteristics Islam had acquired along with the formation of Hui ethnicity. The appearance of these new characteristics is due primarily to the adaptation of Islam to the historical and social specificities in which the Hui have lived" (Ibid., pp. 55). One example of the "social institution" used to justify Hui ethnicity was the Sufi brotherhood, or *menhuan* as it had been named by a Qing official

in late imperial times (Ma, 2000b, pp. 74-5; 2000a). The pamphlet argued that although Sufism was not specific to China, *menhuan*, however, was a social institution that emerged within the particular social and political conditions of northwest China: on the one hand, different from many other Sufi orders for whom the appointment of the charismatic *murshid* (the saint) was merit-based, the *murshid* position of *menhuan* was hereditary and the religious privilege was passed down exclusively along bloodlines. A monopolization of the *menhuan* by a single and powerful family was particular only to Chinese Sufism. In the analysis of the Communists, this monopolization along bloodlines came close to a feudalization since the *murshid* concentrated in himself both religious and worldly powers – he was the feudal lord who also commanded spiritual directorship. On the other, *menhuan* was by no means merely a religious congregation. It possessed large tracts of often fertile land and collected *zakat* from all of its followers. It hired its followers to cultivate its land and extracted rents on a regular basis. It had, in other words, an institutional arrangement which looked extremely like a church. The Communists continued with a Marxist description of the economic dynamic that they thought determined the historical appearance of *menhuan* in northwest China,

> Foreign Muslims initially settled in China in collectives and engaged in agricultural activities. Each collective centered upon a mosque and each was organized independently from all others. Within each collective, the residents hired a *jiaozhang* ("master of the religion") and paid him for his religious service. Islam stipulates *zakat*…and *jiaozhang* was the one person who was in charge of managing this fund. With the evolution of the economy and the increase of wealth, the amount of *zakat* increased accordingly. This gave the *jiaozhang* an immense endowment to purchase and concentrate large tracts of land in his own hand. He hired poor peasants to cultivate these lands and continued to extract rents and taxes. With the continual metamorphosis of *zakat* into rent, the *jiaozhang* also became a big landlord. The clerical distinction between *jiaozhang* and ordinary Hui gradually turned into a class antagonism. This economic transformation was the major reason behind the shift from merit to

> heredity as the sole criterion for choosing the *jiaozhang*. [Note that no distinction is made between *jiaozhang* and *murshid.*]…The continuous growth of the economic power of *jiaozhang* demanded that his rule exceed the confinement of his own collective and the lands of other collectives be placed also under his jurisdiction. A *menhuan* led by a big landlord who possessed an enormous amount of land therefore grew up at the expense of independent collectives.
>
> (Commission on the Study of the Ethnic Question, 1980[1941], pp. 58-9)

To the Communists, the particular economic conditions in northwest China provided the critical social condition for the emergence of *menhuan*. It is this sociological specificity and the process of cultural particularization (the "customs and folklores" adapted to these new socio-economic conditions) which followed closely on its heels that had established the supposed "Chineseness" of *menhuan*. Even the "new characters" that Islam was considered to have assumed in China (whether these "new characters" should be seen as belonging to the transformed "customs and folklores" remained unaddressed) were reduced to reflections of economic conditions: the religious disputes between different Sufi orders were thought to be determined ultimately by the class antagonism between peasants and landlords, and the doctrinal split within one order was thought to be a representation of the resistance of the poor peasants against the hegemonic power of their *jiaozhang* (Ibid., pp. 61-3).

None of these, however, fundamentally distinguished the stance of the CCP from the position of Jin Jitang. The disputable proposition that Islam is a "special religion," which includes a "social dimension" (the Communists appended to this "social dimension" axillary "customs and folklores") absent from all other religions, figured prominently in both. But the CCP's argument did differ from that of Jin Jitang in one crucial aspect which directly related to their political consideration at the time: they emphatically

argued that Hui ethnicity was the product of a special conversion that both preserved and transformed the "social institution, customs and folklores" brought by "foreign Muslims" to China as an intrinsic part of their Islamic way of life (*not* their "religion"). Although still holding on to the argument that Islam is a "special religion," the CCP accentuated the inherent "Chineseness" of Hui ethnicity while at the same time struggling not to reduce this "Chines-ization" to a complete sinicization. They explicitly opposed Jin's argument on an Islamic ethnicity and found it politically pernicious and unwittingly complicit with the Japanese agitation among the Hui for an independent Hui Islamic state. Pan-Islamism, in the eyes of the Communists, was merely a prop that could easily fall prey to the exploitation of Western and Eastern colonial forces (more on this later in this chapter). They must, in other words, find an argument that could kill two birds with one stone: they must be able both to say that the Hui were not Han Muslims and to give the Hui a specific "Chineseness" and turn them into a particularly "Chinese" ethnic group. The "social dimension" of Islam was inserted into this argument to fulfill a particular function: the sinicization of "foreign Muslims" (i.e. their becoming "Han Muslims") could never be completed since this sinicization happened primarily at the level of "social institution, customs and folklores," and as long as Islam continued to be practiced, the "social, customary, and folkloristic" differences derived from this practice could always be made to refer to an imaginary residue of "foreignness" which was progressively but never completely sinicized. Put differently, as long as Islam was a "special religion," the complete sinicization of "foreign Muslims" and their complete transformation into "Han Muslims" were fundamentally impossible; their sinicization would necessarily always include a certain ethnic "foreignness," which was always thought to be the object to

which all observable differences in the Hui's actual practice of Islam constantly refer as signs.

An obvious inadequacy of this argument to its own purpose was that by locating the "Chineseness" of Hui ethnicity at the site of social and cultural transformations in the Islamic lifestyle of the "foreign Muslims," the CCP could never fully demonstrate that a singular and internally homogeneous Hui ethnic group existed. The heterogeneous sociological and cultural conditions in China necessarily led the "foreign Muslims" in different directions, and their sinicization may produce drastically different outcomes. The "social dimension" of Islam could well entail so many variations of "Chinese Islam" that the Hui as one ethnic group never existed and would never come into existence. But in addition to this obvious problem, another question was also systematically excluded from this argument: to what would the practices (e.g. the contribution of *zakat*) of an explicitly Han Muslim convert refer, especially as these conversions were not unknown both in the voluminous historical records and in contemporary publications which the Communists and the Hui intellectuals drew upon as their references (Zhang, 1930; Wang, 1930)? What if, for instance, a newly converted Han Muslim also practiced the very same "customs and folklores" and was included in the same "social institution" (e.g. either the Sufi *menhuan* or a collective living quarter that centered upon a mosque) as the Hui? Where and how could the CCP locate that imaginary ethnic "foreignness" among these perhaps undeniably non-foreign Han Muslims? What if the sign ("social institution, customs and folklores") persisted while the object assumed (the "foreignness") was emphatically missing? In order for their argument to acquire a persuasive power, the possible (and actual) existence of Han Muslims must necessarily be excluded. Again, and

similar to Jin Jitang's argument but in a slightly different way owing to a different political project, the argument of the CCP in fact did not draw a sharp line that substantively separated the Hui from Han Muslims – its logic rather operated on the basis of a foundational exclusion: there was no such a thing as a Han Muslim.

This commonality shared between the CCP and Jin Jitang was by no means coincidental. Much of the CCP's view of Islam was based upon secondhand explanations of it in Hui publications such as *Moonlight*, and they drew from exactly the same body of historical literature in their argument as did the Hui intellectuals writing during this period. The presumption that Islam was a "special religion" with a "social dimension" that differentiated it from all other religions was almost completely replicated from the view shared among many Hui intellectuals. Limited by their linguistic incompetence and the inevitable difficulty in procuring sufficient reference during war time, but also prompted by the need to make their discourses familiar and appealing to the ears of the Hui elites, the Communists could only reassemble and reorganize the "evidences" and the lines of argument already well explored by the Hui intellectuals themselves. They could not and need not start from scratch. They only had to intervene by learning to craft their intervention in the language shared in this discursive field and inflect the discussion in the direction they desired. This was precisely what they did. And in the same stroke, they reproduced the same founding exclusion presupposed by the language shared among the Hui intellectuals.

Although the dubious view that Islam was a "special religion" with a "social dimension" was a major factor in effectuating the exclusion of Han Muslims as the condition for the modern narrative on Hui ethnicity (cf. Bai, 2001, pp. 92), it was,

however, by no means the only one. Oftentimes, this exclusion was cast only in nebulous terms, and the figure of the Han Muslim (somewhat curiously covered up by the figure of the Han woman) appeared fleetingly in the text only to show its structural invisibility. Consider, for instance, the definition of Hui ethnicity provided by Yang Zhijiu, a prominent Hui historian trained in Peking University and specializing in the history of the Mongolian Yuan Dynasty (1206-1368 A.D.): "The Hui-Hui in Yuan Dynasty were not of a single race (*zhongzu*) or ethnic group (*minzu*). They spoke different languages and practiced different scripts, the only commonality they shared with each other being their Islamic faith. Although many of them spoke Persian, it was nonetheless not used widely. It was not until they had studied Chinese that they had the tool to communicate with each other thoughts and emotions, and transfer information among themselves, by means of which a sense of shared identity first emerged. It was from here that a new *minzu* gradually formed which shared an Islamic faith, spoke Chinese and lived in the vast territory of China. This is the Hui-Hui *minzu*. This process was not accomplished until mid to late Yuan Dynasty." The figure of the Han Muslim followed closely upon the heels of this definition: "During Yuan, in addition to the Arabs, Persians and the Turkic people from the West, some Mongols and Han also converted to Islam….Conversions of the Han were due to several reasons: they might have been slaves kept by Muslims, or they wanted to become Muslims by their own will, or still they married Hui-Hui. Today's Hui-Hui *minzu* (especially those living away from Northwest China) were physically similar to the Han except for certain characteristics, and this is the result of the Hui-Han inter-marriage" (Yang, 2003, pp. 2).

The self-contradiction of this definition circles precisely around the figure of the Han Muslim: for at the very site where Yang located the imaginary zero point in the appearance of the Hui-Hui *minzu* (the sharing of the Chinese language as the lingua franca and later the only native tongue and the major language by means of which Islam was communicated and discussed among the Chinese-speaking Muslims), the repressed figure of the Han Muslim returned and haunted his apparently lucid definition. The "conversion" of the Han was attributed to several reasons, but it was the affinal relationship that took center stage and somehow displaced all other possibilities: "Today's Hui-Hui *minzu* (especially those living away from Northwest China) were physically similar to the Han except for certain characteristics, and this is the result of the Hui-Han inter-marriage." In addition to the problematic claim on the "residual" racial characters of the current Hui, this affinal relationship was emphatically asymmetrical in the sexual economy of the exchange of woman: "*I personally think* (*qieyiwei*) that among the Hui from the Western Dominion in Yuan Dynasty, it *should* (*dang*) be natural that women were fewer than men. Since most of them were soldiers, many *should* be bachelors. *Even if* (*ji*) some wives and daughters might have come along, they *should* not have survived the long trudge across Central Asia. With few Hui women available, it was inevitable that the Hui men married Han women. (Emphasis mine)" (Ibid., pp. 476) Conjectures were boldly given. Though no actual historical record could bolster the presumption of this asymmetrical exchange of woman, it was nonetheless upheld. A strong resistance to think about the symbolic function fulfilled by this sexual economy was particularly visible in Yang's treatment of "the only example in recorded history" of a marriage between a Han man and a Hui woman: "*In the very end* (*zongzhi*), this

example could not be used to prove that it was common for a Han man to marry a Hui woman. It could in fact be taken as an example to prove the rarity of such marriages. The reason behind this [– here begins the conjecture] was that there were few Hui women at the time, and *the number was even too small to meet the needs of all Hui men* (*jia benzu yi bu fuyong*). How could they marry Han men?[16] More important, the Hui were different from the Han both in religious faith and living habits. If a Han woman married a Hui man, it should be easy for her to follow her husband. But if a Hui woman married a Han man, she definitely would not be able to get used to the daily life of her husband's family. Therefore, the Hui-Han marriage could only be asymmetrical (emphasis mine)" (Ibid., pp. 478).

The masculinist tone of this resistance was barely hidden, and the unquestioned presumptions (that "it should be easy" for a Han woman to follow her Hui husband, while a Hui woman "definitely would not be able get used to the daily life" of her Han husband's family), buttressed by an uncritical attitude to the institution of patrilocal marriage in which the woman was necessarily in an auxiliary position (however much they might appear to possess some form of "agency" in their intervention in the family *through* their husband), symptomatically revealed the structuring function of the asymmetrical sexual economy in forging the imaginary that operated Yang's argument. This economy was seen to be intimately linked to Chinese becoming the lingua franca among "foreign Muslims," the language through which a particularly Hui Islam was spoken and on the basis of which Hui ethnicity established itself: "With the increase of Hui-Han marriages, the blood of the Han was mixed into that of the Hui-Hui. The

[16] Let's mark the ambiguity of this question: how *could* they marry Han men?

linguistic homogenization of the Hui-Hui and their sharing of Chinese as the common language should also be linked to this" (Ibid., pp. 477).

But suppose we take up the position of a Muslim Han convert whose native language was already Chinese and follow Yang in assuming that the Chinese language was already the major (certainly not exclusive) language by means of which she grasped the teaching of the Islamic religion. The argument of Yang would amount to saying that as soon as she began to be able to speak Islam through Chinese and speak of Islam with other "foreign Muslims" in this Chinese language, she immediately became an ethnic Hui. Put differently, the very position of a Chinese-speaking Han Muslim who understood Islam by and through the Chinese language was in fact colonized by an ethnic Hui identity. To a certain extent, it might even be arguable that in the imaginary of Yang and those who shared his view (cf. Bai, 2001, pp. 93), there was no such a thing as a Han Muslim because, structurally (instead of historically) speaking, the Hui were always already Han Muslims. They could not imagine a Han Muslim without much reluctance, disavowal, and anxious conjectures because this figure was structurally repressed and this repression was presupposed by their narration of a Hui history based *not* upon a racially oriented imaginary. This history, in other words, could not be imagined without presupposing a structural exclusion of the figure of the Han Muslim. The foundation of this intellectual narrative on Hui ethno-history therefore depended upon a fundamental denial and a separation between the Hui narrators and their own unacknowledged and perhaps unacknowlegeable "truth" as Han Muslims. This "truth," placed under quotation marks, was not positioned at the level of historical evidence. I am not making any historical claim as to who the Hui, substantively speaking, really are or are not. I am instead

interested in what must necessarily be excluded and repressed in the historical narrative proffered by the Hui intellectuals in order for their non-racial argument in favor of a Hui ethnicity to appear coherent and persuasive both to themselves and to their mainly Hui readers. It is in a strictly structural sense, therefore, that I maintain the hypothesis that in this historiographical discourse, "there is no such a thing as a Han Muslim."

A Different Political Islam

The imagined self-positioning of the Hui actively advocated by the Hui intellectuals whose narration of Hui history we have read so far went beyond the narrow domain of academic discussion and reached deep into their attitude to the Chinese (Han) nationalistic politics. On the one hand, many Hui intellectuals, as we have seen, tried painstakingly to argue that the Hui were not Han Muslims and should be seen as one minority among others. On the other, however, the same Hui intellectuals often thought in political terms *in place of* the Han, *for* the Han, and even at times unwittingly *as* the Han. This peculiar conflation of opposites (*verbally* denying proximity while in political *practice* assuming a position as the "shadow" of the Han) seems to me a symptomatic representation of the paradox that the structural truth of the Hui intellectuals, the truth of their discourse, resides precisely in the figure of the Han Muslim which they unknowingly impersonated while simultaneously disavowing this impersonation. In this section, I will link this paradox to the critical social, historical and political factors in the Republican period that went into the sharpening of this basic paradox and triggered among the Hui elites a political vision that was both Han *and* Islamic.

At the same time as the Hui intellectuals were debating the ethnic status of the Hui, Japanese secret agents were already insinuating themselves into the Hui in Northwest China, agitating for an independent Islamic "Hui-Hui state" seceded from China (Zhou, 2006, pp. 24-66; Ando, 2003; Li & Feng, 1985, pp. 1777-1793). The new "Hui-Hui state," envisioned by the Japanese imperial power, would range from the Tarim Basin to the fertile Ningxia plain, placing under its jurisdiction both the Turkic-speaking Uyghur and the Chinese-speaking Hui-Hui. But the Japanese were not the only predator. The territorial ambition of Soviet Russia, its surreptitious plan to render Xinjiang into a quasi-protectorate after the model of Mongolia, abetted by the Chinese Communists, only aggravated the political threat posed to the new Republic.[17] As a timely response to these political ruses, the KMT established in 1929 the Committee on Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs (*meng zang wei yuan hui*) to supervise specifically all religious and ethnic affairs pertaining to minority areas, including especially Xinjiang and Manchuria. A new and fast-expanding academic discipline also gradually took shape, and was later named "Study of Border Politics" (*bian zheng xue*). It served the purpose of assembling empirical knowledge about peripheral minority areas so that the hand of the new state could reach beyond its immediate center and its military could effectively petrol every mile of its precarious border.

The Uyghur Xinjiang, by the time of the 1930s, had been ruled by successive Han warlords and deliberately insulated from the rest of China. Practically an independent kingdom only nominally subjected to the rule of the KMT government, Xinjiang well

[17] A series of works written by the British agents posted to defend the interests of the Empire in Central and South Asia provide interesting and at times brilliant first-hand accounts of the contest between the British, the Russians and the Chinese in strategically tilting the balance of power in Xinjiang (and Tibet) in their own favor. See Younghusband, 1904; Skrine, 1996; Skrine & Nightingale, 1973. For general histories that pertain to this particular competition, see, among others, Alder, 1963; Clubb, 1971; Lattimore, 1972, 1950.

into the 1940s kept only tenuous communication with the political center of Republican China. The limited power of the official authority could hardly intervene in the tumultuous "Great Game" in Central Asia which risked wresting Xinjiang, perhaps even a large part of northwest China, away from the hands of the KMT government. This worry on the side of the KMT was aggravated by the loss of Manchuria to Japan in 1931, and by the onslaught of the Japanese forces further into northern China. Previously marginal and relatively insignificant, northwest China was now becoming strategically critical as the heartland, the base behind the enemy lines which could serve as the haven for a temporary retreat and for re-assembling resistant forces for retaliation.

But northwest China became the gem not just for military reasons. In the early 1920s, Sun Yat-sen was already laying out developmental plans in which Xinjiang and northwest China figured prominently, primarily for their presumably enormous reserves of mineral resources (coal and iron, foremost among others) and huge tracts of unpopulated land. In *The International Development of China,* a detailed elaboration of his plan published in English in 1922, Sun prioritized the construction of railway systems that reached far into the hinterland of northwest China, and he talked therein explicitly of "the colonization of Mongolia and Sinkiang (Xinjiang)" as a necessary supplement and natural sequel to the development of the railway systems (Sun, 1922). Migration of the Han to the northwest was encouraged and reclamation of uncultivated land propounded. The message was fairly unambiguous: the peripheral minority areas, more particularly northwest China and the Uyghur Xinjiang, were crucial both for providing badly needed resources for modern industrialization – which in turn would bolster the production of modern weaponry and machinery – and for alleviating the daily decreasing land-man

ratio in central and eastern China (cf. Zhu, 1944). If the Han did not want to suffocate in a progressively contracted environment with gradually exhausted resources, the argument went, northwest China must be conserved, protected from foreign insinuation, and placed under well-planned and efficient exploitation. Put this way, the periphery in fact became the center, and the minorities (or their land) became the redemption of the majority.

There is yet a third reason for the northwest to become for the KMT the destiny of the new Republic. *Huang Di*, the Yellow Emperor, the supposed ancestor of all Han, was thought to be an extraordinary leader of a tribal coalition that originated in northwest China. It was said that he later conquered the eastern tribes, colonized their land, settled down in what is now called "China proper," and initiated the long process which culminated in the ultimate formation of the Han civilization (Division of the Study on the Northwest Question, 1942, pp. 2). In this narrative, northwest China was the gem not just for military and economic reasons; it was also the pearl because it was thought to have preserved, with its arid climate and sparse population, both the material traces of the ancient Han civilization and the spiritual legacy of a "magnificent race" whose soul, according to many, must be re-invigorated so as to rid the Han of the impending danger of colonial subjugation and racial extermination.

This is the particular historical juncture in which the political vision of the Hui intellectuals took shape. Many volunteered to take up the burden of bringing northwest China – especially Xinjiang – back under the control of the KMT. Prominent Hui intellectuals and military generals were appointed into the Committee on Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs. Ma Fuxiang, father of the Ningxia warlord Ma Hongkui, was chair of the

Committee from 1930-1931.[18] Tang Kesan, an imperial scholar-official in the Qing cabinet and a graduate of Peking University during the Qing Dynasty[19], was an influential member of the Committee, and a founding trustee and president of the renowned Chengda Normal School, *the* institution for modern Hui Islamic education in China. In a lecture delivered on a Committee meeting in 1929, Ma Fuxiang laid out his brief project for reshaping the governance of Mongolia, Tibet and Xinjiang. The passage that pertained specifically to Muslims was reprinted in bold font in *Moonlight*,

> In addition to the Mongolian and Tibetan questions, I personally have a more intimate knowledge of the Uyghur Hui in Xinjiang and the Salar Hui in Gansu and Qinghai. Eighty percent of the Xinjiang population is Uyghur, and the Salar's residential area spans across Linxia, Xunhua, Barong, and Guide. The number of their total population is huge, but their lack of knowledge, their ignorance, is even more serious than the Mongols and the Tibetans. Even the Hui-Hui living closer to China proper are not considerably better.
>
> (Ma, 1929, pp. 5)

But Ma himself was a Hui-Hui, and his lecture was reprinted for a Hui-Hui audience who could read and were eager to read. Its publication in *Moonlight* was intended to elicit ambitious Hui activists to step in and fill the missing link, to strengthen the tenuous tie between "China proper" and the peripheral Muslim areas. In a series of provocative essays published in *Moonlight* in 1930, Li Tingbi, a Hui Muslim scholar and political activist, provided an exposition of the complicated political situation in the northwest and the danger of losing Xinjiang to the Britain and the Soviet Russia in the same way as Manchuria was lost to Japan. He took pains to demonstrate the economic transformations Xinjiang had undergone since the early 20th century, and reiterated the crucial role of

[18] For a well-documented biography of Ma Fuxiang, see Ding, 2001.
[19] The interesting and complex relationship between Islam and Confucianism in imperial China, primarily in late Ming and Qing Dynasties, has become an increasingly popular topic among scholars of Chinese history and philosophy. See, for example, Ben-Dor Benite, 2005; Murata, Chittick, & Tu, 2000, 2009.

Xinjiang in providing the rising China with indispensable mineral resources for modern industrialization. The key point that subtended this series of essays is a basic judgment: that the Uyghur, although sharing the same religion with the Chinese-speaking Hui, were nonetheless so "backward" and "ignorant" that they could not but easily fall prey to the insinuation of the Russian Communists, who exploited the linguistic, cultural, and even religious commonalities the Uyghur shared with their Central Asian neighbors in order to wrest Xinjiang from China and place it under Russian protection (Li, 1930a). The urgent mission of the Hui, argued Li and many of his contemporary Hui compatriots, was to devote themselves to a fierce competition with the Soviet Russians, to salvage the Uyghur from the evil hands of the atheist Communists into which the Uyghur were falling unknowingly, and to save the new Republic from losing this strategically critical land. That the Uyghur were "less civilized," not far from a "savage state," and were too "naïve" and "credulous" to recognize the nature of the imminent danger was the major reason that Li thought necessitated the intervention of the Hui. The Hui were portrayed as most suitable for this task primarily because, in the eyes of the Hui activist intellectuals, they could bond with the Uyghur by means of a shared Islamic faith while at the same time keeping their loyalty to the Han Chinese state.

Talks of expanding and developing education among the Uyghur were pervasive when Xinjiang became the subject matter in the essays published in Hui journals. But the education proposed (it was seldom actually carried out and stayed largely on paper) was organized primarily within a Chinese framework, and intended more as propaganda in line with the political demand of the new nation-state. The Uyghur were often presumed to be not yet mature enough to realize both what kind of political situation they were

facing and what specific political obligation they should fulfill in the new state, and it was believed that only the Chinese-speaking Hui living in or near the China proper, especially those with a clear understanding of what was happening both within and without the country, were well positioned and specially disposed to serve this mission of converting Uyghur into Chinese citizens. A common feature of these "civilizing" proposals was their conciseness. It often remained obscure what kind of "education" and what form of "knowledge" were presumed by the Hui intellectuals to be indispensable for the "enlightenment" of the Uyghur, and more specifically, how the Hui could fulfill this daunting mission. One piece published in *Moonlight* in 1932, for instance, compared the Mongols to the Uyghur living in northern Xinjiang: "There still exist among the Mongols some old Confucians who could read and teach Confucian classics, although their teaching remained much tangled and confused. But the Uyghur were not even there!" (Xue, 1932, pp. 17) This lack of "knowledge," to the author, was the direct cause for the lack of "an idea of the state" among the Uyghur. His education proposal was both short and obscure: "I think at places where culture is still backward, it is not higher education that should run first. The most urgent need is to establish elementary schools and let the Uyghur know they are Chinese citizens. This shall be the very first step" (Ibid., pp. 17). But should the education be given in Chinese or the Uyghur language? Should the "idea of the state" be taught alongside "the Confucian classics" which the author seemed to think marked the relative cultural superiority of some Mongols? How could "an idea" of the new state, a state whose "center" was far removed from Xinjiang (the name "Xinjiang" literally means "the new border") and tightly controlled by a Han government, be conveyed in the complex Uyghur language, if the Uyghur language was ever thought to

be an option at all? Not even a single voice of the Uyghur could be heard in such proposals, and given the tone of them, it might not be far-fetched to surmise that to these Hui intellectuals, the Uygur were thought to be unable to speak; that they had yet to acquire the ability to speak to others about their "real situation." Most of the Hui intellectuals who were eager to "help" could not speak the Uyghur language. Perhaps, the Hui elites could not and did not bother to listen to the Uyghur. They thought they knew better than the Uyghur themselves did who the Uyghur were or who they should be, and the Hui elites thought they were qualified to decide on the Uyghur's future.

Sun Yat-sen's project for "colonization" by means of large-scale migration was again put on the agenda, but this time, it was forcefully re-proposed by Hui intellectuals. Wang Zengshan, a Hui intellectual educated in China's elite Yenching University and then moving to Turkey for a graduate study in politics, was appointed upon his return a congressman in the KMT parliament and selected by Chiang Kai-shek in 1931 to be the Special Commissioner for Xinjiang Affairs (*xinjiang tewu weiyuan*). One of a few selected Hui who could acquire such an eminent position, Wang was well respected and his speeches were often reprinted in Hui journals and referenced in numerous other speeches and essays published in the same set of periodicals. His view in the 1930s followed almost step by step Sun Yat-sen's project for "colonizing" Xinjiang, and explicitly proposed in 1934 that large-scale migration projects should be planned by the state in order that "the Xinjiang culture (*xinjiang wenhua*)" could "harmoniously mix (*tiaohe*)" with "the Chinese culture (*zhonghua wenhua*)" (Wang, 1934). His view was well corroborated by some prominent Hui clerics, one of whom, Wang Mengyang, even advised in a public letter addressed to him upon his inauguration as the Special

Commissioner in 1931 that the Uyghur in Xinjiang should be "assimilated (*tonghua*)" into "the Chinese nation (*zhonghua minzu*)" (M. Wang, 1931).

The political loyalty of the Hui to a Han China reached far beyond the border of the new Republic. Immediately following the onset of the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945), an official Hui delegation consisting of five elite Hui set out on their journey around the Muslim world. The constitution of this delegation was worth noting: led by Wang Zengshan who could speak Turkish, it also consisted of Ma Tianying (a civil servant in the State Ministry of Foreign Affairs who could speak both French and English), Zhang Zhaoli (a Hui intellectual who could speak English), Xue Wenbo (a Hui intellectual and social activist), and Wang Shiming (a prominent Hui cleric who joined the group in Egypt, and the only one in the group who could speak Arabic). They professed to represent Islam in China, but none of its members, however, came from the Uyghur or other Muslim minority groups. Departing from China, travelling across Hong Kong, South and Southeast Asia, and finally arriving in the so-called "Near East" which on their map included Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Turkey, Iraq, and Syria (notably, Iran was missing from the list), the group's intention was not to bond with other Muslims in pursuit of a political Pan-Islamism which would place all Muslims – the entire umma – under the political jurisdiction of a single caliph and mobilize the entire "Muslim world" as a unified force in the face of Western colonialism. They were not proponents of any Pan-Islamic state or empire. To the contrary, they wanted to garner help from around the Muslim world by demonstrating to them the perseverance of the Chinese (Han) people in resisting the onslaught of the Japanese imperial forces (Wang, 1942).

This trip came in the midst of what seemed to these Hui elites an urgent political situation: secret Japanese agents were infiltrating Xinjiang and northwest China to convince primarily the Turkic Uyghur and the Hui to secede from China and to establish, together with other Inner and Central Asian Muslim populations, a Pan-Islamic empire. What complicated this situation was the fact that the Japanese had already lent much help to the Uyghur "rebels" in their independence-seeking military operations in the 1930s and there existed a strong pro-Japanese sentiment among some Uyghur elites because of such collaboration. The Japanese scheme even included a plan to enthrone an exiled Ottoman Prince, Abdul Kerim Efendi (1904-1935), as the head of the Pan-Islamic Empire they envisioned (Esenbel, 2004; Aydin, 2007).

The Hui intellectuals, however, did not fully realize how complex and ironic a politics they were involved in. The Japanese infiltration of northwest China was in fact a fraction of a much broader Japanese Pan-Asianist vision that dated back to the late Meiji period in the early 20th century. This Japanese Pan-Asianism, from the outset, attempted to cultivate a close coalition with the Pan-Islamic political project of the Muslim world, especially the Pan-Islamic Turkic intellectuals in Central Asia and the Ottoman Empire. Early 20th century Pan-Islamists saw Japan as a "rising sun" in Asia that had acquired a political and military power strong enough to counter the hegemony of Western colonialism, and even looked to Japan as the model to be emulated and replicated throughout the Muslim world (cf. Worringer, 2001). Some even argued that the Japanese should be systematically converted so that they could, as pious leaders of the Muslim world, become "the savior of Islam." Japanese Pan-Asian nationalist elites skillfully maneuvered this Muslim passion for a Japanese liberator and some of them sincerely

believed that the future of Asia as a whole hinged upon the melding of Japanese Pan-Asianism and (largely but not exclusively Turkic) Pan-Islamism. It was thought that such a coalition would wrest Asia from the domination of Western colonialism and set it on a path to independence, emancipation, and development.

It was not merely the West that was seen as the enemy to be defeated, as a matter of fact. This coalition between Pan-Asianism and Pan-Islamism propounded both by Japanese nationalists and Pan-Islamic Muslim intellectuals also saw Soviet Russia as a major threat to be contained, especially when a majority of the exiled Pan-Islamic Muslim activists in Japan were from Central Asia and the Ottoman Empire, and when Russian communism was seen as a grave menace for the expansion of the Japanese Empire in Asia. Specifically for the Japanese Pan-Asian nationalists, a close collaboration with Pan-Islamists and the "Muslim world" would help obstruct the encroachment of Russian forces in Central Asia and the Near East, and create a buffer zone for the emergent Japanese Empire while simultaneously – and this was the part of the story that the Hui intellectuals well knew – reducing the influence of the Chinese state in East and Inner Asia. A notable fact in the course of forging this alliance whose irony was lost to the Hui elites was that among all the participants who signed in 1909 on the scroll that marked the foundation of Ajia Gikai (Asian Awakening Society), the major propaganda machine of Japan in the Islamic world, there were three Hui Muslims. One of them, Wang Haoran, was a prominent Hui cleric who was much respected in China for his effort in initiating modern Islamic education for the Hui in the renowned Niujie Mosque in Beijing. The irony went even further. Many of those Japanese participants who signed the scroll were close associates of Kokuryukai, or Black Dragon Society, a

Pan-Asianist, but also strongly nationalistic Japanese organization with an avowedly imperialist bent which later became a major source of assassinators, infiltrators, and spies in the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945) (Esenbel, 2004).

The point was that the Hui elites who traveled to the "Muslim world" in 1938 did not share this internationalist sentiment. Although Japan was seen as an Asian exemplar of modernity closer to home and worth emulating in early 20th century, its Pan-Asian vision in the 1930s was viewed in China completely in a negative light as the Second Sino-Japanese War gradually picked up. We should note that the particular kind of Pan-Islamism propounded by the Japanese Pan-Asianists was largely, though not exclusively, a Pan-Turkic political vision. The image of "the Rising Sun and the Turkish Crescent," and even the imaginary historiographical discourse that a historical connection could be established between Japanese culture and the Altaic culture of the North Asian nomads ("our Altaic brothers"), reigned supreme in this coalition between Pan-Asianism and Pan-Islamism. Wang Haoran's support of Ajia Gikai was somewhat curious and certainly short-lived, replaced by a wide-spread enmity to both Pan-Asianism and Pan-Islamism among the Hui intellectuals. To a certain extent, it is arguable that the explicitly Pan-Turkic undertone of the Japan-backed Pan-Islamism ran directly contrary to the strongly Chinese (Han) nationalistic commitment of the Hui elites. They even went to the length of arguing that taking advantage of the adversity China had been plunged into and seceding from it in order to establish either an independent Islamic state or to merge into an emergent Pan-Islamic empire would be precisely against the well-being of Islam. A "Hui state" or a new Islamic empire that took shape by splitting extant countries, in their

view, would precisely be detrimental to Hui Islam in particular and to world Islam in general.

In their view, an independent Islamic state established with the help of colonial powers (either Japanese or Western) would be no more than a semblance of independence, a puppet state, and would inevitably lead to the ultimate extinction of Islam. Japanese propaganda of liberating China's Muslims from the yoke of the Chinese Han empire was looked on cautiously and cynically, and one of the gravest accusations leveled against the "backward" Uyghur at this time was precisely the latter's attempt to seek help from the Japanese. Seen from the perspective of the Hui intellectuals, the Pan-Asian and Pan-Islamic scheme advocated by the Japanese as the future of a unified and strong Asia was completely a cunning political ruse that would first decompose the vast Chinese republic and eventually turn against Islam when its power reached an unchallengeable scale. They argued painstakingly for the unconditional devotion of all Hui in China to the defense of the Han majoritarian republic, since it was presumed that with the loss or even the compromise of China's political independence in the face either of the Japanese or the Western powers, *all* Muslims living under China's jurisdiction would eventually be deprived of the basic social and political conditions required for the free practice of the Islamic faith. Speaking from a position they took for granted, they actually assumed that an independent (Han) nation-state was the precondition for the survival and flourish of the Islamic religion in China. An essay published in *Moonlight* in 1932, for example, propounded that "We Muslims are still citizens of the Republic of China. The protection of our life and property depends upon the fate of the Republic" (Wang, 1932). This stance remained consistent throughout the 1930s and well into the

1940s. The voice of the Uyghur and other Inner Asian Muslims was erased, and the Chinese-speaking Hui intellectuals put themselves in a position to speak for *all* Muslims within the Chinese border.

But this is not all of it. There was yet another discourse gradually taking root among the activist Hui intellectuals, which proposed a different politics of global Islam that was professedly not Pan-Islamic. If Pan-Asianist Japanese nationalists imagined that Japan and "the Muslim world" (primarily a Turkish Muslim world) should collaborate to lead Asia out of the colonial quagmire, the Hui activists proposed an alternative vision in which the Chinese (read the Han) took center stage as a critical force that the "Muslim world" could not afford to ignore. An article published in the first issue of *Moonlight* enumerated the "weak nations" (*ruoxiao minzu*) which had been subjected to the Western colonial rule. The list included China, Turkey, India, Persia, Afghanistan, Egypt, Morocco, and Saudi Arabia. Its point was to demonstrate that among all the "nations" that either had become or were being colonized, the Chinese nation (centering upon the Han) and the "Islamic nation" (*Huijiao minzu*) were two major colonized peoples with the largest combined population. If, as the essay argued, the emancipation and self-determination of the Chinese nation depended primarily upon the struggle of the majoritarian Han, the liberation of all subjugated peoples from the chains of Western colonialism depended upon the alliance of the "Chinese nation" and the "Islamic nation," the combined population of which was thought to constitute well over half of the entire colonized peoples. A dual ethnocentrism in terms of "civilizational superiority," in addition to a rough headcount, also underwrote this proposition: in contrast to those "weak nations" who had no option but succumb to the oppressive power of the West,

both the “Islamic nation” and the “Chinese nation” were supposed to have been blessed with long and impressive histories of preeminent civilization. The point therefore was to pass the heavy responsibility of liberating all subjugated peoples in the world into the hands of the allied forces of the Islamic world and the Chinese (Han) world. This double ethnocentrism self-congratulatorily located the Chinese Hui Muslims at a junction imagined to be particularly critical: they were seen as the only viable connection that could link the two supposedly strongest anti-imperialist and anti-colonial forces. In this political imaginary, the rights to self-determination of all “weak nations” ultimately relied upon whether the Chinese-speaking Hui could forge that crucial united front upon which, according to many Hui intellectuals, depended the life and death of all colonized peoples (Wang, 1929). Propounded by Wang Mengyang, one of the founding editors of *Moonlight* and an eminent Hui intellectual and composer, this view acquired wide popularity as one reads through Hui publications of the Republican period. It seemed that both Islam and the Han could not survive without the Hui – or so the Hui elites thought.

Therefore, it should not be difficult for us to understand why from the very beginning the Hui intellectuals were against the Partition in India, against the Indian Muslims’ secession from India to establish the independent Islamic Republic of Pakistan. To them, Britain was to India as Japan was to China, and the position of Indian Muslims was compared to the place of Uyghur Muslims. To the Hui activists, it was the same question of anti-imperialism that defined both. But we should be clear that they were not against statehood-seeking political Islam *per se*. As a matter of fact, most Hui activist intellectuals in the 1930s and 1940s did not clearly distinguish between a secular “Muslim state” and an “Islamic state” which proclaimed to rule in the name of God and

"codified" the Sharīʿa in a way never done in the entire history of Islam (Hallaq, 2013, 2009, 2005b, 2004). Turkey was praised primarily for its political reforms and social revolutions that raised it above other "Muslim states" in terms of its strength in resisting imperial forces. That its transformation produced a secular state and Atatürk abolished the institution of the caliphate seemed to matter less than its political and military success. The famous political lecture of Muhammad Iqbal, the spiritual founder of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, was translated and reprinted in *Moonlight.*[20] There was a special section on every issue of *Moonlight* that reported the most up-to-date political information in the Muslim world. But there was, however, no clear formulation of a modern "Islamism" among the Hui intellectuals, and no intrinsic connection between Islam and statehood was established. They cast their political aspiration primarily in terms of a (Han) Chinese anti-imperialist nationalism. They thought *in place of* the Han, *for* the Han, even while they were trying to forge an international coalition with all "Muslim/Islamic states" around the world. They were committed to a special kind of "global Islam," the kind that did not contradict as much as presuppose a nationalist rootedness. But we must insist on the crucial fact that this "global Islam" was predicated upon an essentially double exclusion: on the one hand, "Han Muslim" was rendered ultimately unimaginable. And on the other, Uyghur Muslims were invariably relegated to a passive position. The former could not speak because they were presumed not to exist, while the latter could not be heard because they were seen as underserving of listening. The historical narrative proffered by the Hui elite intellectuals and the politics that went

[20] See Hai, 1933. The original text was "Presidential Address Delivered at the Annual Session of All-India Muslim League at Allahabad on the 29th December 1930," in Iqbal & Tariq, 1973. Iqbal's politics bears an interesting relation with his philosophy; it both extends his philosophical thought and contradicts it in ways perhaps not coincidental. For his philosophy, see Iqbal, 1960. For a recent discussion of Iqbal's political vision in relation to his project for reconstructing the religious thought of Islam, see Diagne, 2010.

with this historiographical discourse were marked by this dual exclusion which stood at the threshold of the self-narration of the modern Hui as a special ethnic minority in the new Chinese nation-state.

Conclusion: Between the Han and the Uyghur

Slightly more than a year after the violent Uygur protest on July 5th, 2009, which, according to the official report issued by the state Xinhua News Agency, claimed 197 casualties (the World Uyghur Congress, an exile Uygur political association, insisted that the real number was much higher, around 600) (Xinhua News, July 18, 2009; BBC News, July 6, 2009), I met Qianli on my fieldwork in Henan. Born and raised in Xinjiang, more particularly in Ili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture, Qianli was a Hui who considered himself to have an intimate knowledge of how inter-ethnic relations in Xinjiang had deteriorated over the past two decades. He was well versed in the historical narratives discussed in this chapter, and because of his personal experience, he was particularly critical of the absence of the Uyghur voice in them. After graduating from college, he spent several years in the 1990s as a journalist working for the official party newspaper of the prefecture. "I could earn as much as ten thousand RMB just in a month," Qianli boasted to me, "every businessman wanted to have a piece on the paper, and the party committee was eager to polish their image as well."

But money was not what Qianli was after. A provocative writer and impassioned commentator on political topics, he quit the "institution (*tizhi*)" in late 1990s and began to run his own underground magazine, *Guanzhu* (Perspective). Both the main and sole editor of *Guanzhu*, Qianli wrote ceaselessly on topics that ranged from ethnic relations in

China (especially in Xinjiang), Islamic education, poverty in Hui areas, to international politics, American imperialism, and the Palestine-Israel conflict. The magazine was freely given away and anyone could email him to order a copy – he printed his email address on the back cover, together with his bank account information to request donations from generous readers. The distribution of the magazine depended primarily upon personal networks: Qianli often mailed a dozen copies to the wired Hui clerics he knew, who then distributed them both among the local mosques and beyond while they traveled. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the magazine, despite occasional contributions made by supportive readers such as me, gradually ate away his savings and put him in heavy debt. But he continued to write, and he insisted on paying every time we had meals in a local Uyghur restaurant. One of his heroes was Edward Said, and upon learning that I was from Columbia where Said used to teach before he passed away, Qianli was very excited. "I think Islam *must* be on the Left (*yisilan jiu yinggai shi zuode*)," he told me determinedly, when he mentioned Noam Chomsky together with Said as the two intellectuals he admired in the West.

But Xinjiang came up only after a short while. As I probed him about his view on the so-called "July 5th Incident," Qianli suddenly wound into a somewhat shocking comment on the Hui,

> If that day eventually comes and the Uyghur insurgents have cleared all blocks until they finally reach the building complex which is the Xinjiang government, they will see that it is the Hui who will form the very last line of defense. It is the Hui who will fight for the Han even after the Han themselves have given up. They cannot survive in a Xinjiang ruled exclusively by the Uyghur, they will struggle to maintain the Han government in Xinjiang.

Qianli had always been blunt, and I had somehow been used to his sharp comments which I often took with a pinch of salt. He did not provide any explanation for his relentless critique of what he called the "slave mentality" of the Hui, and upon my probably annoying prodding, he hesitantly conjectured that "it might be because the Hui do not have their own traditional territory like the Uygur do." He could not give me a persuasive explanation, and his hesitation indicated that he could not even convince himself. But he nonetheless insisted that the Hui had a "slave mentality."

As the lamb kebab we ordered was put on the table by a Uyghur waiter[21], Qianli joked with the young man in the Xinjiang dialect of mandarin Chinese which he grew up speaking. "You see," he told me after having his fun, "even while serving, the Uyghur did not lose their sense of humor." And even while condemning the "slave mentality" of the Hui, Qianli nonetheless could not displace himself from the position he otherwise vehemently criticized. But why "slave mentality" when, it seems, the Hui are imagined to be at the site where the life and death, spirit and guts (the masculinist undertone should not escape us) of the master are located? In a somewhat twisted manner, the structuring sexual imaginary in which one takes oneself as the desire of the other resurfaces in Qianli's discourse, and the redemption of the Han master, again, is seen to depend upon the slavish Hui. The Dao of truth, however, is merely replaced by the Dao of force.

[21] I do not know his name, even though I had many meals in this restaurant and saw him many times during my fieldwork. I could not, as I write this sentence, find another word to call him except "a Uyghur waiter." My own identity as Hui therefore subjects myself to the same critique which I have leveled against the Hui intellectuals whose discourses and politics I have studied in this chapter. This is the limit of this chapter, and perhaps also the limit that demarcates the field of the visible in which this dissertation as a whole unfolds. I *should have* made an effort to know his name, and the names of all other "Uyghur waiters" I have encountered in my fieldwork. The lack in ethnography points to a lack that founds my own *Weltanschauung* as a Hui.

Part I

CHAPTER 2

Niche of Islam: the Disputed Space of the Mosque

Down Mosque was among the very few mosques in the central urban area of Zhengzhou that still boasted a small Hui community clustering around it. The weave of this daily disappearing community progressively unraveled as multiple tides of municipally backed housing projects jostled the Hui to other parts of the city. Located at the margin of the old inner city which had become the center of the new and still expanding Zhengzhou, Down Mosque was only ten minutes away by bus from the place where I lived during my fieldwork. Almost every Friday afternoon, I would cleanse myself, join the other Hui, and perform my own religious duty, the weekly Jumu'ah prayer, under the lead of one of the imams at Down who had become both my informants and my friends. The Jumu'ah prayer at Down Mosque on October 22, 2010, however, was a bit different – even awkward. As the crowd slowly moved out of the prayer hall after the ritual and into the elevated courtyard, a notice posted on the wall directly facing the exit of the prayer hall caught the eyes of many. It said that on October 21 – that is, the day before – an election had taken place among the Hui Muslims who prayed regularly in

Down with the administrative assistance of the Guancheng District Bureau of Religious Affairs (to whose jurisdiction Down Mosque belonged), and a new commission for the management of Down Mosque had been elected through a completely democratic and legally justified procedure. Members of the new commission, according to the notice, would soon assume their new roles after a short period of "deliberation" and "advice-seeking," in the course of which, as the wording of the notice implied, there might even be a change of personnel as a result of "negotiation." The notice was not put up by any Hui – its red letterhead and the seal of the local bureau of religious affairs stamped firmly over the date printed at the end indicated that it rather came from the government.

Many of those who set their eyes upon the notice were as unenlightened as me regarding the happening of this somewhat mysterious and certainly hasty election on Thursday. But no one protested, at least in a way that could make a scene and assemble sympathetic support. I was much puzzled as to why the election happened on that particular day: shouldn't a truly "democratic" election be carried out only after all qualified voters (i.e. all residents in the local Hui community whom Down Mosque was supposed to serve) had been informed beforehand of the exact location and time of the election? Shouldn't a "democratic" election to appoint the commission that would look over one's own communal mosque be carried out precisely at the time when the largest number of local Hui would come to the mosque to perform the weekly Jumu'ah prayer which could only be performed collectively with other fellow Muslims? Why Thursday, just one day before the day for the collective prayer? What was the rush?

The only reason I could think of at that moment was a commonplace which I had been told countless times in my fieldwork, especially by young Hui who initially

introduced me into the local world but most of whom in fact were not locally rooted: that the government did not want the Hui to control their own mosques, and it only wanted "its own people" in the commissions. The nominal "democracy" was frequently ridiculed, and every such election I had come across at Down Mosque was invariably seen as a shameless fraud. But this prevalent cliché, however, was soon overturned.

"Did you know about this?" I asked an old Hui man who happened to be reading the notice by my side.

"No, I didn't. I just saw it." He shook his head and replied calmly.

"I don't understand. Why are people not informed in advance? Why Thursday? Shouldn't this be done after Jumu'ah, when the turnout is perhaps much higher?" I expected a confirmation of the cliché which I had heard previously.

"Of course you cannot do it on Jumu'ah. There are too many people on Jumu'ah." He couldn't have said it in a more matter-of-fact manner.

"But isn't that precisely the point? Shouldn't people know beforehand that there would be an election for a new commission? Isn't it unfair?" I probed further.

"You cannot have too many people in. You cannot put up a notice in advance. If you do that, it'll be too complicated. There would be a fierce competition and a huge crowd. By the end of the day, the mosque might fall into the hands of someone who never came for prayer but who was well-connected and could acquire the highest votes by bringing in his relations. This happened a lot elsewhere…"

I did not receive the confirmation I initially anticipated, and was much surprised to find that the hasty election was not criticized as much as commended precisely for its hastiness and unpredictable timing. It was as if in order for a "democratic" election to be conducive to the good management of the local mosque, the procedure must be changed and the number of votes deliberately limited. Only those who came regularly for prayer should be given the chance to vote, while others living in the same community, although *de jure* qualified, should nonetheless be kept out *de facto* in order to prevent the situation from becoming "too complicated." Deeply embedded in the local community, Down Mosque, to those who shared this view, should by all means be wrested away from the complex local network consisting of dense human relations.

And this view is not uncommon. In fact, for many Hui who frequent mosques for daily prayers and casual socializing, the word "democracy (*minzhu*)" conveys a mixed message. On the one hand, it refers to the supposedly universal right to religious freedom, to effective political representation, to a world that in their imagination is diametrically opposed to the authoritarian rule of the Chinese party-state. On the other, however, whenever "democracy" comes up in a conversation particularly within the context of a mosque (at least those which I participated in), it almost invariably elicits a comment that might seem to be precisely contrary to the dream for liberty: that too much democracy, too much freedom, has been allowed by the state in the mosque; that democracy, instead of its opposite, has undermined the free practice of Islam – or at the very least, the maintenance of the sacred space, i.e. the mosque, by which Hui Islam is thought to acquire its most concrete traction in the actual social world of Han China. This

contradiction often results in an ambivalent attitude to state intervention: it is both resisted *and* desired, seen as both disruptive *and* necessary.

It is this complex and ambiguous space which I propose to discuss in this chapter. My primary focus in this chapter is on urban mosques, and this particular concentration is mainly due to the fact that a major part of my fieldwork (7 months) was spent in Zhengzhou, the provincial capital of Henan Province. But I also travelled to the surrounding rural areas either individually or with Hui clerics whom I have known or befriended and who brought me on their visits to places where their colleagues and students worked (the mobile character of Hui clerics will be discussed in chapter 4). My work in Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region has also brought me to multiple Hui villages and towns. In the course of my discussion, therefore, I will make brief comparisons between the management of urban and rural mosques, with emphasis laid still upon the former. I hope to be able to demonstrate how urban mosques are inscribed in a more complex political economic framework which probably intensifies the problems that are common to most mosques I have visited.

The complicated dynamics in a locally rooted Hui mosque, as shown in the scenario at Down Mosque with which I open this chapter, cannot be completely reduced either to an overt confrontation with the authoritarian state (which is rare) or a more or less covert maneuvering that always engages the intervening local government in a clear-cut duel. To a large extent, this chapter is not interested in the (sometimes reified) contradiction between "civil society" (of which religion is commonly seen as a key component) and atheistic (much stronger than "secular," given the particularly communist legacy of China) authoritarian state – a contradiction that has been amply investigated by an enormous

amount of academic literature (Yang, 2012; Yang & Tamney, 2005; Ashiwa & Wank, 2009; Madsen, 1998; Yang, 2008; Goossaert & Palmer, 2011; Palmer, 2007). What I would like to discuss in this chapter, to the contrary, are the concrete institutional conditions that subtend the traction of Hui Islam in the Chinese Han social world. Instead of treating mosques more generally as places where Hui Islam is discussed, debated, taught, or reformed (all these certainly do constitute important functions of Hui mosques, as they do perhaps in all other mosques), I choose to focus more specifically on how the mosque itself is built and demolished, governed and managed. Islam does not develop and spread on its own, and how it develops and spreads cannot be detached from the concrete material conditions that both facilitate and contain its expansion. I subscribe to the view that the anthropology of Hui Islam should first attend to the political economy of the mosque as the very basic condition to which the complexity of religion owes its material anchor in the concrete social world. It is to this political economy that I now turn.

Locating the Mosque

The first day I arrived in Zhengzhou for my fieldwork, Laoyang took me on a night tour to February 7th Square, where a few locally well-known mosques clustered. The square was thus named to commemorate an enormously influential strike of railway laborers in 1923, a workers' movement organized by the then developing Communist Party still believing – wrongly, as they later would think – that in order to have a proletarian revolution, they should work among the actual proletarians and start from where they concentrated, i.e. the rusty industrial workshops and factories in the city. They had yet to learn the Leninist lesson, turn away from the "strongest point" in the capitalist regime, and focus on the rural masses, the peasants, who later became "the

natural allies" of the weak Chinese proletarians. In the 1920s, Zhengzhou was located at a critical strategic point of the Peking-Hankou railway that ran across Hebei, Henan and Hubei Provinces, connecting northern to central China. Railway was still a rarity in early 20th century China, and its vast power in transporting goods and people (esp. the military) across long distances in a relatively short period compared to other pre-modern forms of transportation earned it crucial political, economic, and military significance. The Communist Party believed that by intervening in this strategic point and by paralyzing this main artery with a devastating strike, for however brief a moment, they could on the one hand weaken the forces of the anti-revolutionary warlords, and on the other, educate the proletarians through the power of organization and enlighten them in their theoretical and practical role in revolutionizing China. The strike was violently suppressed on the night of February 7th by the army of Wu Peifu, the warlord under whose sphere of influence the Peking-Hankou railway was laid and who exacted massive profits from it to finance his military venture. Fifty-two workers were shot dead and hundreds injured. Together with the slightly earlier strike of the mining laborers in Anyuan (Jiangxi Province) led also by the Communists[22], the February 7th Strike was taken by the CCP to be a milestone in the history of workers' movements organized by the "vanguard" Communists before they moved their base to the countryside.

But this episode of Communist revolutionary history, and of workers' struggle against capitalist imperialism, was very much overshadowed in the 2010s by the overwhelming commercialization and capitalization in China, readily observable

[22] See Perry, 2012 for a detailed account of this strike and the revolutionary politics surrounding it. See also Perry, 1993 for the early work of the Communists among the Shanghai proletarians. Perry's work serves as an exquisite introduction to the complex situation of workers' struggle during this period, although whether her approach can be called Marxist remains disputable.

precisely in the area where the February 7th Square was situated. A landmark at the center of the city, home to the February 7th Tower – which also functioned as a museum of the strike, but whose entrance often remained closed during the seven months of my fieldwork in Zhengzhou – under which the pale memory of the strike was peddled in the form of cheap postcards and costume photography, the Square was the hub where five major roads met and department stores, flagship shopping centers, small retailers, fast food stands and even wholesale warehouses clustered. The Zhengzhou Rail Station was only minutes away by walk, and one long-distance bus terminal was located only slightly farther, bringing daily in and out a huge amount of tourists and merchandises. The traffic on the square was invariably congested, and it became practically a parking lot during the rush hour. Dust and litter, sweat and exhaust, combined with restless horns, unruly driving, and loud music which blasted from the high-volume stereos that flanked the entrances to department stores, created a dizzying orgy marked, however, by a glaring ephemerality – everyone was rushing towards and then away from the square. Streams of traffic converged and then diverged in different directions, and the memory of revolution was daily washed away by these restive currents.

On the night when I paid my first visit, while we were standing on the part of the square where vehicles were not permitted and only pedestrians allowed, Laoyang tried to point out to me where the mosques he wanted to show me were located. “There,” he said, “one is there.” He moved his index finger across the space and pointed to what I thought was no more than darkness that sunk deep into the night sky, shaded and concealed by the dazzling neon lights that competed to win the attention of passing customers. “Where? There?” I pointed in the direction he gestured to, but still could see nothing.

> Yes, it's just there, you see the dome? It's dark, but do you see the contour? Can you recognize it? It's right there! You see it? Right there!

Despite the referential efforts made by Laoyang and my strenuous attempt at recognition, I still could not see. The neon lights were just too distracting, and the music too loud. And while I was still trying to figure out the position of the dome he referred to, Laoyang had already set out to tell me about his plan of opening a small eatery in the vicinity of the square.

The mosques on and in the immediate vicinity of February 7th Square – which I later frequented in my work – constitute particularly useful examples in demonstrating the general transformations in the Chinese urban landscape that effect a shift in the ecology of urban mosques. Journey (*lvzheng*) Mosque, for instance, was initially built in the early 20th century on donations from small Hui merchants who travelled from Kaifeng to Zhengzhou for business. Being outsiders, these Kaifeng merchants daily commuted between the urban market where they peddled their hand-made merchandise and the rural villages where they found their temporary residence. Journey Mosque was built by a collective fund pooled by these Hui merchants primarily to meet their demands for performing timely prayers during daytime. The mosque is situated at the margin of the "old city" (*laocheng*), which was for a long time the only urban area before rapid urbanization set in in 1990s. Neither entirely in the city nor completely outside it, the location of Journey Mosque was in the old times a direct reflection of the somewhat ambivalent social position of its patrons.

But other mosques built primarily by local Hui and serving local religious demands are no less ambivalent in their locations. We cannot, however, expect to find a generally

applicable pattern in the locational distribution of all urban mosques in Chinese cities. Neither are they subject in equal measure to the urban developmental projects that swept across most Chinese cities in the past three decades. Most contemporary Chinese cities whose history reaches far back into the imperial days have an old "inner city" which was initially the city itself, the "core" from which later expansions shoot out in all directions. Some of these "inner cities" are further divided, with a small walled residential complex at the center often reserved exclusively for the Manchu elites and military generals in the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911 A.D.). These small "Manchu cities" (*man cheng*), as they were called in the late imperial days, lost their exclusivity after the fall of the Qing, but the "inner cities" which enclosed them remained the commercial and political centers of the local world. The location of early mosques – those that would later become the regional hubs in developing Hui Islamic education and disseminating information from beyond the confined local world – in these old inner cities is similar to that of Journey Mosque. They are often situated on the edge of the old city and at the margin of the market. Oftentimes their names bear the mark of this obscure position – the word *guan*, or pass, is endemic, and almost every old city, insofar as there are mosques in it, has, for instance, a *xiguan* mosque (mosque at the western pass), or a *nanguan* mosque (mosque at the southern pass). These *guan* mosques often stand close to the old city wall, either already demolished or still existent. In present times, they are every so often used as geographical markers on bus stops that quietly narrate the largely forgotten urban landscape now barely recognizable.

Although economic liberalization in China is often traced to the late 1970s in the immediate aftermath of the Cultural Revolution, most cities in China did not engage in

large-scale infrastructure construction and aggressive urban developmental projects well until the mid-1990s. Some might have started slightly earlier (e.g. Beijing and Shanghai), but for most (including Zhengzhou), the conditions – primarily the financial ones – would not obtain until late 1990s. The rise of an increasingly unruly banking system that both benefited from and actively facilitated risky speculation went hand in hand with local governments' heavy dependence on short and long-term loans from the state banks to finance their expensive expansionist projects. Tax revenues, only a fraction of which would be kept for local development while the rest must be submitted to the central government, could hardly fill the gaping hole in the municipal budget, and getting into debt was and continues to be the only option left for most local governments – urban and rural – in China. One crucial way – now increasingly the *only* way – for the local governments to pay off these debts was to work with giant real estate businesses and to capitalize on the socialist state monopoly of landed property still officially laid down in the constitution.

What this means is that municipal governments, in the name of modern urban planning and claiming to improve the living conditions of local residents (most of whom in the 1990s were still living in modest low houses clustered together and squeezed into tiny spaces) would force the residents – especially those who were living in and around the "old city," which had by now become the central district with the highest property price – out of their old quarters, offer them meager compensation, and "transfer" (*churang*) the cleared land to the highest bidder among the real estate merchants, with whom the governments often cultivated a close cooperative and invariably lucrative relationship. Initially, some municipal governments provided a modest subsidy to those

who wanted to purchase their way back to their old home at a price much higher than for which they were compensated. Some municipal governments even at times reached an agreement with the real estate corporations to reserve several blocks at a discounted price only for those old residents who were eager to live in the neighborhood where they had grown up. With the progression of time, and especially after mid-2000s, however, these sporadic efforts at sharing even a fraction of the government revenue were nowhere to be seen. Little hope is left for those who have thus been expropriated from their houses to return to their old neighborhood, which will soon become unrecognizable to their very eyes.

It is in this rapidly shifting urban landscape that we shall situate the contemporary Chinese urban mosques, especially those that function as regional hubs on the edge of the "old cities" (Journey Mosque being one such regional hub, as its patrons gradually settled down in Zhengzhou and their descendants became "local" Hui). The expansion of the urban area especially in the past two decades has brought significant changes to the ecology and political economy in which these mosques are embedded: instead of being on the periphery of the Han city, sitting vaguely between the inside and the outside, and straddling the border that separates the city and the countryside, they are now lodged at the center of the new city, occupying the land over which both municipal governments and real estate speculators drool. From the dilapidated ancient city wall and the quiet villages which were often minutes' walk away, their neighbors have now become Walmart, McDonalds, and IMAX movie theaters.

But mosques are not separate islands each closing in upon itself and remaining largely independent from its surroundings. Most urban mosques in China have a *fang* – a

relatively compact Hui community that centers upon a mosque as the site for performing religious duty. The drastic shifts in urban landscape which often begin from the "old city" where mosques are located inevitably put much pressure on these vulnerable Hui communities. In order to have an idea of the concrete consequences these transformations have entailed, let us return to February 7th Square and its immediate vicinity. Of the four mosques that are situated in this area, Down Mosque (the one that appears at the beginning of this chapter) fashions us with a particularly interesting example. Situated slightly farther away from the Square than the other three, Down Mosque is one of the two in the area which still boast a small Hui community that concentrates in its immediate neighborhood. The urban developmental scheme that commenced in late 1990s in Zhengzhou slowly picked up speed at the turn of the century and was running full steam in mid-2000s, extending well into the second decade of the new millennium. The neighborhood that encloses Down Mosque has already been transformed by a housing project, which scattered many of the Hui residents previously living in the neighborhood over other parts of the city often tens of miles of away. Given the steady rise of property prices around the Down Street area and the prospect of a new housing project under discussion behind the closed door of the municipal government, there might be little hope that those who were displaced in the first round could ever buy their way back. But even many of those Hui who could afford and have bought new apartments in the revamped neighborhood despite the huge gap between the compensation they received and the market price they have had to pay have moved outside the neighborhood to seek chances elsewhere – the new districts are spreading their wings, leaving the "old city" behind, with its congested traffic and polluted environment. The new apartments

purchased around Down Mosque are often rented to outsiders who move into the neighborhood either from other parts of the city or – which is increasingly the case – from other places in the province. Albeit not exclusively, many of these new residents are Han who come to the provincial capital to seek opportunities in their turn. In other words, there has been a progressive decrease in the number of Hui that live in the neighborhood of Down Mosque, and a rising tendency that the remaining Hui are more sparsely distributed in the community – if still there is one – that surrounds it.

But this does not mean, however, that the number of Hui who pray regularly in Down Mosque would necessarily dwindle. Laozhang, a man of seventy who has long retired from a life-long job as a chauffeur, used to live right next to the mosque. The housing project in late 1990s hauled him over to a different part of the city. He would daily commute by bike to the mosque to "rush" to the prayer (*gan bai*). "If I go home after Dhuhr (the midday prayer), I will have to set out for the mosque again around 3:30 pm, just to be sure that I arrive in time for Asr (the afternoon prayer)." At my inquiry, he started to give me a brief schedule that he daily followed –

> You see, if you set out later than that, you won't make it. From 4 to 5 pm, February 7th Square is usually extremely crowded, with pedestrians, bikes, motorcycles, big buses, taxis, and cars all congested and jammed. You have to count that in, and leave time for that. It often takes me forty minutes to one hour to come to the mosque, depending on the traffic. I couldn't come in for Fajr (the morning prayer) – it's too early. And I cannot come home after Asr, since it's only about an hour between Asr and Maghrib. I need to stay and wait. If Isha (the last prayer) is not too late, I can do it in the mosque. Otherwise, I have to go home and pray on my own – after dinner and before I go to bed.

The prayer schedule that Down Mosque follows and is chalked on the board in the courtyard is markedly different from what one could retrieve from online calculators that

profess to provide accurate prayer timing for all places on earth. For multiple times during the early days of my fieldwork, I either missed prayers or arrived too early, since I thought only one set of timing was followed in Zhengzhou and I could trust the online calculators. It turned out, however, that many local mosques in Zhengzhou (at least those which I have visited or where I have prayed) follow a completely different set of prayer schedules, and even the specific date of Eid can be subject to dispute (whether one should literally watch for the moon or follow the pre-designated calendar, and whether the local calendar or the calendar in Saudi Arabia – supposed to be the "center" of Islam – should be followed). No one in Down Mosque knows exactly why it is this particular daily schedule for prayer that they have been following since time immemorial, and why it differs from the one produced by online calculators. The clerics whom I talk to well know this disparity, since they have regular access to computers and Internet connection and some even have Adhan software installed on their smartphones. But they still prefer to follow the old schedule. What Laozhang told me adds an additional dimension: neither time nor space is abstracted from the complex cityscape which, with its rapid shifts and rhythmic temporal and spatial punctuations, is constituted by concrete frictions, nexuses, bumps, bottlenecks, accidents, rush hours, and (mal-)functional traffic lights. Most of the regular mosque attenders are over sixty, and many are over seventy. Those who have diabetes – a common disease among many whom I came to know in the field – are even more careful in designing their own daily schedules: they must punctuate their days with light meals, and the one hour between Asr and Maghrid was for many a time of struggling and persevering, a time for *jihād*, as some said. Few could wait until the time of Isha – that would be too risky for a diabetic, who have to have early dinners.

The apparently confined act of prayer in such a context necessarily integrates a much larger world without the hidden but indispensable support of which the prayer in the mosque would be utterly impossible. The discipline of prayer and the bodily arrangements by the laborious execution of which "virtue" can be acquired therefore presuppose a no less rigorous corporeal discipline outside the more marked and confined "religious" field which has been the primary focus of anthropologists interested in the materiality of religious and ritual acts (Asad, 2003, 1993; Mahmood, 2005; Keane, 2007, 1997; see also Mauss, Pickering, & Morphy, 2003). It is certainly true that perhaps anywhere the explicitly religious discipline – especially the five prayers in Islam – would necessarily demand a re-alignment and re-arrangement of "non-religious" life, but the particular urban environment of Chinese cities might entail an enormous intensification and produce a much tighter articulation between prayer and other "secular" acts. To believe and to practice one's faith in such an environment, one has to compartmentalize one's whole life according to the rhythm of prayers that punctuate the waking hours. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this spatio-temporal intensification does not decenter religion as much as accentuates it. Previously, Laozhang might only need to walk a few minutes to come to Down Mosque to pray – he did not have to make any meticulous calculation in terms of time. But now, the three daytime prayers take his entire afternoon (perhaps even more), and he has to follow an exacting schedule organized exclusively according to these "religious" acts, each of which in itself might take no more than a mere ten minutes.

Laozhang is not alone in facing this critical intensification of space-time arrangements resulting from the rapid changes in the urban landscape. Many of the aged men and women I had daily contact with in my work follow a no less punctilious

schedule – some (predominantly men) drove small motor-tricycles instead of riding bikes in order to be able to arrive on time for their prayer. I constantly heard anxious safety concerns among the imams – especially when someone who commuted by such a vehicle arrived late or simply did not show up. The imams kept a phone book and would call when such an absence appeared two or three times consecutively. It would be an exaggeration to argue that the new urban environment has made mosque-going a risky activity, but we nonetheless have to register the crucial fact that this spatio-temporal re-organization has relocated the activity of "rushing" to prayer in a completely different ecology – in fact, it is this very ecology which has produced this "rushing" in the first place.

To be sure, there are people who are not willing to quietly succumb to this encroaching regime of urban development, and they try painstakingly either to conserve or to rebuild the Hui community around the mosque, even when these mosques themselves have at times to be demolished and perhaps rebuilt elsewhere to make space for department stores and movie theaters. Zhenkun is one such figure, and an unyielding one at that. A prominent calligrapher of Chinese and serving multiple terms as vice-president of the Islamic Association of Zhengzhou, Zhenkun was in his early 70s when I met him at his office in a real estate company. It was a mystery to me how he could move so smoothly from his post in an Islamic association to a managerial position in a real estate corporation, and the only reason he was willing to offer was that he was merely "helping out a friend." Highly experienced in maneuvering the dense human relationship in the local world, his renown derived largely from his life-long engagement with local

affairs. Zhenkun was well respected among the local Hui clerics and his calligraphic work is much valued among the district and municipal government officials.

The project he was working on and which he showed me on a map in his office has to do with a Hui community still enduring the at times shocking and for many painful process of urban development on the edge of the "old city." The deterioration of this community, however, is already perceptible. Located only fifteen minutes' walk away from Zhengzhou Rail Station and slightly farther removed from the more expensive area of February 7th Square than Down Mosque, Fuminli Mosque, the mosque upon which this community centers, is somewhat strangely and uneasily situated at a site which is so close to the line of cheap brothels that flank the community to which it belongs. These brothels often employ young rural female sex workers who come to Zhengzhou looking for jobs and serve primarily the long-distance truck drivers who arrive daily from other places within the province to transport large amounts of merchandises to the Zhengzhou Rail Station for further distribution. Many Hui living close to the mosque in fact benefit from this bustling environment: they sell inexpensive and easily made foodstuff to passersby and patrons of the brothels, and small-scale retail is among the most common occupations among the Hui in this community.

In 2010, the Zhengzhou Municipal Government, together with the Guancheng District Government, decided to revamp the entire neighborhood and to wipe off from the landscape what in their eyes was a "slum (*peng hu qu*)," with its almost iconic brothels and its sprawling germ-ridden food vendors. Engineers and urban planners were brought in from as far as the prestigious Tsinghua University in Beijing to conduct investigations and to propose feasible plans for redeveloping the area that centers upon Fuminli Mosque.

No specific attention, however, was paid to the particularly Hui character of the community that would be most severely hit by this top-down developmental scheme. The final project pending approval from the municipal government at the time of my fieldwork proposes to turn the entire neighborhood – because of its particular location on the very edge of the old city separating the innermost circle of Zhengzhou from its "new districts" – into a stripe of grassland that would, according to the experts, be conducive to improving the air quality of the old city by ameliorating the pollution that results primarily from the congested traffic. Both Fuminli Mosque and the old houses that cluster around it would have to be completely demolished, and the possibility for those expropriated to return to their old neighborhood is entirely ruled out in this proposal. This time, it's not a new housing project that is envisioned – it is the complete elimination of any house and the complete transformation of the entire neighborhood into a place where no one at all is allowed to live that are planned by the outside experts and silently discussed and deliberated over behind the closed door of the municipal government

Zhenkun politely refused my request to make a copy of the layout with which he showed me the details of the proposal. "This has yet to be officially announced to the community," he said, "and it must be kept confidential. A leak would cause too much of a commotion, and people might take it to the streets (*shang jie le*)." But he did not hide from me his discontent and the alternative plan he himself charted out, which, according to him, was strongly backed by the district government but temporarily shelved by the municipal government who "only trust the outside experts who in fact know nothing about the actual local world." In the proposal submitted by the Tsinghua experts, the Hui living around Fuminli Mosque would be hauled *en-mass* and *en-bloc* to the fringe of the

expanding Zhengzhou, left to fare on their own with a meager compensation. A new mosque would be built with government funding to serve their religious demand. “But it’s not merely a question of making a home at a different place and praying in a different mosque,” Zhenkun continued, “Many of these Hui depend upon a prosperous market and a large threshold population for their small business to survive. Moving them to the margin of the city simply means unemployment and poverty. What can they do to survive? They have nothing to fall back upon.”

Zhenkun thinks that this is the major reason why his plan is seconded by the district government who in his eyes is more concerned with the concrete social and economic consequences otherwise glossed over by the municipal government: “It is the district government who would have to deal with the nitty-gritty world, and they don’t want a big trouble.” In his alternative plan, Zhenkun proposes that instead of turning the entire neighborhood into grassland, the government should clear the space to establish a new comprehensive quarter which includes both new residential apartment buildings and a commercial pedestrian street where the Hui who purchase a home in the new buildings could continue their small business. “Then you can have urban development which would not deprive people of their livelihood while at the same time reduce the financial burden of the government – which would be tremendous if you have to displace so many people just for a piece of grassland at the center of the city.” Five months later by the time I left Zhenghou, the dilapidated Fuminli Mosque was still left standing in the shantytown that surrounded it – it in fact had a new imam lately, who already knew that where he served might soon be buried in rubble.

To locate urban mosques in Zhengzhou, therefore, is to come to grips with a highly mobile ground whose dynamics could hardly be controlled by the Hui who nonetheless have to bear its often grave consequences. The traditional location of the mosque is intimately linked to the particular form of life – both economic and social – that many Hui have grown used to and have over the years been able to maintain in the face of occasionally cataclysmic transformations. A major shift they have to face since early 2000s is not violent political oppression that forbids the practice of the Islamic religion in everyday life, as it was the case from the late 1950s until the end of the Cultural Revolution. What comes as less brutal but no less intrusive and perhaps even much more insidious and influential in the long term is a fundamental transformation in urban landscape that threatens to dissolve the sociological and organizational conditions upon which the institution of the mosque gains traction in Chinese cities.

By saying this, I am not treating mosques as separate islands that stand on their own. What I have called the "institution" of the urban mosque necessarily goes beyond the actual confinement of the mosque itself and includes a larger Hui community into which it is inscribed and to which it inevitably belongs. The physical structure of a mosque could be easily demolished, removed, and perhaps rebuilt elsewhere, as long as there is sufficient funding either from voluntary donations of the Hui or from state grants that compensate the displaced Hui for the cost of urban development. But the life that has long been attached to the mosque cannot be as easily grafted onto a different environment. Even when the mosque remains physically unmoved, its re-location in the urban landscape as a result of the political economic changes that happen around it could just as well render the practice of faith into a more grueling effort. One could perhaps ask, if

Fuminli is demolished and rebuilt on the margin of the expanding Zhengzhou and the entire Fuminli community is relocated to cluster around this new mosque, would the old residents be able to endure the shocking change in livelihood and continue to come to the new mosque regularly for communal religious duties? Zhenkun's worry was emphatically not about the rise or decline of Hui Islam. His concern was not framed in terms of religious faith. The question he was most concerned with was how the Hui in Fuminli could be able to keep their community intact and meanwhile earn enough to get by under the new urban development project. It's not the mosque itself that he was interested in. A new building standing lonely on its own at the margin of the city might as well be an elegy dedicated to the Hui community that once surrounded it and as a matter of fact substantiated its function in bodying forth the presence of Hui Islam in the Chinese social world. Zhenkun well knew this, which was perhaps why after a brief account of his plan for rebuilding Fuminli Mosque at a site slightly removed from its current location, he spent the rest of our time together talking endlessly about his project for a "gourmet pedestrian street" (*meishi yitiaojie*) which he thought might best help the Hui regain their small retail business in an environment that grows daily hostile to the kind of life that has sustained their faith and their mosque for a long time.

Codifying Democracy

The relationship between a Hui community and its communal mosque is mediated not merely by the critical political economic conditions that cannot be detached from the general urban transformations in China especially in the past two decades. This relationship is no less constricted and constructed by a complex network of state laws and administrative regulations. Two of the longest and most detailed sections of the

Regulations for Religious Affairs (*zongjiao shiwu tiaoli*) promulgated by China's State Council in 2005 are devoted to the management of the so-called "sites for religious activities" (*zongjiao huodong changsuo*) and "properties of religions" (*zongjiao caichan*). According to these administrative regulations (they are *not* laws passed by the National Congress), a mosque is under the direct jurisdiction of the bureau of religious affairs of its county (in the rural area) or its district (in the urban area). This governmental supervision covers a wide range of affairs that are seen to pertain to the running of a mosque: from its initial construction, who should be hired as the presiding cleric, to its particular location and the management of its "religious property." A mosque is above all a physical presence that has to stand on a site which is deeply entrenched in the local dynamics of economic transformations, as we have seen in the previous section. A mosque also has its own "properties," either small tracts of land, as is often the case in the rural area, or extra houses or rooms that could be set aside for collecting rents, as is more often the case in the urban area. To be sure, these are not marginal facts, however much one might want to assume that a Hui mosque is entirely about Hui Islam and should therefore be seen exclusively in terms of its religious significance.

Northern Grand Mosque in Zhengzhou is one such example that can well demonstrate this point. Undoubtedly the biggest mosque in Zhengzhou, Northern Grand is well-known both locally and nationally. It was the pivot on which the "leading *fang*" (*shoufang*, a *fang* that is locally influential and often forms the center for mobilizing concerted Hui action in the local world) in Zhengzhou turned before the Cultural Revolution and managed a vast Hui cemetery (*Laofengang*, "the old knoll," as it is remembered by those whom I interviewed) whose land had over the years become its

quasi-property, secured eventually by a land deed in late imperial days. Northern Grand also holds the iconic building which symbolically narrates the more or less mythical prominence of Hui Islam in Zhengzhou: it lays claim to *Baba Mu*, or the Tomb of Baba, a legendary Arab Muslim with the name "Mumduha" who is said to have arrived at the mosque in the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) on his travels to China and settled down here in order to preach and make peace out of the long-drawn-out tension that had existed between the local Hui and the Han. The Tomb of Baba was the site upon which the entire Hui cemetery centered – it is said that many Hui in Zhengzhou chose to inter their deceased relatives near the Tomb in the hope that the mystical saint who was said to be able to produce amazing miracles could bring upon their beloved ones blessings from God in the hereafter.

From mid-1990s on and especially with the continual progression and gradual acceleration of urban development in Zhengzhou, both the Tomb of Baba and the vast Hui cemetery on which it stood and to which it constantly referred became sites of intense dispute and protracted negotiation between the Northern Grand Mosque (i.e. both the clerics that lived in the mosque and those Hui who lived around it, buried their deceased in the cemetery, and took active part in managing affairs that pertain to the mosque), real estate corporations, and the cash-hungry Zhengzhou Municipal Government. The Tomb of Baba stood right next to February 7th Square, and the Hui cemetery, from a piece of wasteland used as a burial ground, became almost overnight (the rapidity of the change must be emphasized) a place that could generate tremendous profits for whoever could transform it into a commercial venue. What added to the intensity of the negotiation was that the rents from the tract of land that enclosed the

cemetery also constituted a major source of income for Northern Grand Mosque in maintaining its normal operation. The loss of the Hui graveyard would therefore mean the fundamental cancellation of the economic condition on which Northern Grand could sustain its most concrete physical presence. In one official document which I came across in the small archive of the Guancheng District Bureau of Religious Affairs to whose jurisdiction Northern Grand Mosque is subject, the very first objection raised by "the people of Northern Grand" was that "the land on which the graveyard stands provides a major source of income for our mosque," and "if it is taken away, how can we maintain our religion on an independent basis (*ziyang*)?" The deliberately ambivalent – even threatening – tone of this last question might not be immediately clear to those who are not deeply entrenched in the local Hui world: on the one hand, it harks back to the official "three-self" policy proclaimed by the Chinese state as the basic principle for the governance of all institutional (or institutionalized – the history of the institutionalization of religions in China has been given much attention in more recent scholarship[23]) religions in China. The "three-self" principle is officially defined as "managing (the religious affairs) by oneself (*ziban*), economically dependent solely upon oneself (*ziyang*), and proselytizing by oneself (*zichuan*)." The target of this policy is first and foremost China's Catholicism, whose complicated and often hidden connection with the Vatican constantly escapes the surveillance and largely failed control of the officially recognized "Three-Self Church," which claims to be completely independent – especially

[23] For the debate on the religious character of Confucianism and its complex history of institutionalization both in China and beyond, see Chen, 1999; Sun, 2013. For the transformations Buddhism has undergone since early 20th century, see Welch, 1967, 1972; Tuttle, 2005; Pittman, 2001. For Daosim and the so-called "popular religions" in China, see Nedostup, 2009; Goossaert, 2007; Palmer, 2007; Chau, 2006.

organizationally – and performs its ordination separately without seeking either permission or certification from the Vatican (cf. Lozada, 2001).

When applied to the mosque, this direct reference to organizational independence entails a particular consequence: instead of separating a state-recognized and largely puppet Chinese Catholic Church from the Vatican, the "three-self" principle segregates each *fang* from all others and legally prescribes that each *fang* has the right to freely decide on how they want to manage their own mosque, what kind of property and how much of it should be purchased or sold to maintain the normal operation of the community mosque, and who from the community itself should be given the power and the responsibility to manage the affairs of the mosque in place of all other people living in the same *fang*. To a large extent, therefore, the result of the "three-self" principle for Hui mosque is a certain local autonomy that is strictly confined within the unit of a singular *fang*. Any notion of a *shoufang* that previously existed informally among the Hui was first officially abolished – though it had never been officially recognized in the first place – in the 1990s and this abolition was merely reaffirmed in the 2005 *Regulations*.

By apparently begging for sympathy from the state, the "people at Northern Grand" in fact led the negotiation in a particular direction by implying that with neither sufficient funds nor a stable source of income, they might have to re-invigorate their local influence and assemble support from the wide net it could cast in the world of Hui Islam both in Zhengzhou and beyond: "if the economic condition for our organizational independence (*ziyang*) is completely eliminated and if we cannot depend entirely upon ourselves, then perhaps we should stop closing in upon our own *fang*, and this is not what we initially wanted but completely compelled by the circumstance that was entirely the result of the

arbitrary confiscation of our property by the municipal government." This possibility was in part substantiated by an effort to collect an enormous number of signatures on a motion to salvage the cemetery and the Tomb from the bulldozer dispatched by the government. The long-drawn-out negotiation eventually ended in late 1990s in a deal that struck at the middle point accepted by all sides involved: *laofengang* was not confiscated as much as sold to the state at a price (27.5 million RMB – the scale of this sale is indeed remarkable) most advantageous to the "people at Northern Grand," and a tract of 6.752 *mu* (≈1.112 acres) was conserved around the Tomb of Baba so that a small memorial park could be built.

Obviously, the "people at Northern Grand" do not include those buried in *laofengang*, or even the living relatives of the recently deceased, although by the time of this negotiation, *laofengang* had long been fully occupied and had not accepted any new burial for quite a few years. Sunge, a native Hui of Zhengzhou who had witnessed the whole process of the disinterment of the bones, recounted to me his last visit to *laofengang* as the ground was being cleared for what later became the first Walmart in Zhengzhou,

> There was a family who had been living right next to the graveyard for I don't know how long. They had become over the years voluntary watchers of the cemetery. They had a small courtyard and I went through it to the back of their house. An old man sat in an armchair, watching his son as he squatted on the ground re-assembling the bones that had been excavated by the mechanical diggers sent by the government. You cannot imagine that scene. Many bones were smashed, some tightly bound in bundles of white cloth. They wanted to find a place to re-bury them so that the dead could at least have some peace. But how could they find the right place? I don't know whether they eventually managed to do this, but think about the bones…

These bones could be disposed of almost arbitrarily because the cemetery in which they were interred is seen to be exclusively the possession of the "people of Northern Grand." We need to be more specific as to who these people are and the particular state regulations and legal prescriptions that give them this right to dispose of the cemetery defined as their "property." I have already mentioned the "local autonomy" of *fang* as a unit that stands on its own and remains independent from any other *fang*. This particular institutional arrangement, which some Hui clerics see as a manifestation of the state's cunning strategy of "divide and conquer," is legally prescribed in a series of administrative regulations. That few of these are actual laws passed by the National Congress is a notable point – "religion" is largely reduced to a question of administration and governance, instead of the protection of constitutionally determined "rights." What substantiates the nominal protection of the right to religious freedom in the constitution is not a body of laws that specify how this protection can be realized as much as a configuration of administrative regulations that concretizes how "religious affairs" should be governed, controlled, surveilled, and perhaps at times re-defined – when the "religious question" exceeds its "proper limit" and becomes a "political question," as it often happens with Tibetan Buddhism and Uyghur Islam. The 1994 *Regulations on the Management of Sites for Religious Activities* prescribe that each such site should establish a self-contained and organizationally independent body for self-governance, and the 2005 *Regulations* further specifies that each site should be governed in strict observance of "democratic principles (*minzhu guanli*)." But the actual contents of these "democratic principles" often remain obscure and unspecified.

In 2006, the Eighth National Congress of China's Muslims, convened by the All-China Islamic Association (*zhongguo yisilanjiao xiehui*), passed a resolution that explicitly stipulates what particularly for a mosque these "democratic principles" are. The central institutional arrangement codified in this state-backed resolution is the so-called "commission for the democratic management of the mosque" (hereafter the commission). This is not a national organization, but an institution that is required to be established and confined entirely within the confinement of a single *fang* that is thought to center exclusively upon one mosque. According to this resolution, members of the commission should be elected through democratic negotiations and voluntary recommendations among the Hui living in the same *fang*, and the commission is fundamentally a civil organization consisting primarily of ordinary Muslims living in the *fang* in which the mosque is located. The wide range of functions this commission is supposed to perform is worth noticing: it ranges from hiring clerics to serve the local community (more on this relationship of employment in chapter 4), raising funds for the local madrassa, managing the properties owned by the mosque, to supervising fire prevention, environmental hygiene, and even postponed marriage (*wanhun*) and birth control (*jihua shengyu*) among the local Hui residents.

Although hiring clerics and funding the local madrassa might be seen as belonging to "religious affairs," the commission itself is not a body defined by clerical power. It is rather a manifestly secular institution. Clerics are not *de jure* excluded from the commission, but it is not as religious figures that they take an active part in the supervision and management of "mosque affairs." They must also pass the "democratic procedure" as qualified candidates competing with other no less qualified contestants

who, however, do not possess the same amount of religious knowledge and the same clerical authority as he does. But in most cases, few Hui clerics are actually included in the often ferocious competition for posts in the commission (the extent of ferocity often depends upon how much property the mosque possesses and how profitable those properties are or can become – I shall demonstrate this shortly) and many would choose to excuse themselves for a temporary absence during the time when a competition – i.e. an election of the commission within the *fang* where they work – becomes so intense that his presence might put him in a difficult position between two or more hostile sides each trying to get their own people into the commission. Shortly after the election at Down Mosque and while the "negotiations" were still raging among supporters of different candidates, Imam Mai, who holds the highest clerical position in Down, deliberately asked for a leave to visit his family in a rural town about two hours' drive away from Zhengzhou. He stayed home for almost two weeks in order to avoid direct confrontation with any of the competing sides. Upon my probing when I met him after he returned, he said, "Whoever are elected, I will work with them. I will just do my job, but I am not part of the competition and do not want to be part of it. If I am here, people might suspect that I may have some plan. But I don't. You see, Guangtian, in every mosque, there is evil, and you must stand up and fight against it. You cannot waver." The way to fight, for Mai, is precisely to avoid being involved in the ugly and occasionally all-out quarrel from which no one could emerge unscathed. To evade both suspicion and victimization and to continue to be able to stay at Down Mosque and work for Hui Islam, Imam Mai, perhaps wisely, chose to keep his hands off the competition for power and money.

But the small amount of property which Down Mosque possesses largely keeps the competition relatively mild. Things become much more intense when the mosque possesses a considerable amount of property which could easily be capitalized and liquidated. Garden Mosque, located right next to Journey Mosque and lodged at the very center of February 7th Square, well illustrates this point. The prayer hall constitutes only a small part of the enormous building complex it possesses. In addition to a kindergarten it runs for the local Hui kids and warehouses it rents out to the merchants and shops whose storefronts are located in the prosperous pedestrian street, Garden Mosque also runs a convenience hotel whose profit, thanks to the large flow of people daily in and out of the February 7th Square area, reaches a high of two million RMB annually. At the time of my fieldwork, two commissions – one "old" and the other "new" – were engaged in a fierce and occasionally violent competition to gain the upper hand in wresting the ludicrous property – especially the hotel and several other storefronts rented out to small merchants – away from the hands of the other. Details of this competition are not without interest for our discussion.

Around 9 am on a freezing morning in November 2010, a bunch of thugs hired by the "old commission" broke into the quiet Garden Mosque. Like in a blitz, they smashed everything in sight and, as I was later told repetitively by almost everyone who either witnessed the event in person or heard it from others, "they first of all destroyed the security camera that hung right above the entrance." Members of the "new commission" and their entourage that lived in the mosque were quick in their response. Within an hour, the thugs were brought down to their knees. "We shouted Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar! And we were unstoppable!" Chunguang, a staunch supporter of the new

commission who happened to stay in the mosque the night before, recounted to me in a passionate tone. “The police were here as well,” he continued, “but they could do nothing. They were scared – not by the thugs, but by us!” The excitement of Chunguang made his voice quiver and his eyes tearful. As the subdued thugs were beaten and questioned (“we almost beat them to death” – Chunguang told me), it came as a surprise that many of them were in fact Han hired by the “old commission” at 100 RMB per day to wreak havoc on the Garden Mosque which had come under effective control of the “new commission.” Some of the Han thugs who were lucky enough to have fled from the initial defeat even came back to Garden in the afternoon for their remuneration, thinking that the people who hired them should be “in the mosque” since the entire affair circled around it. They could not tell what was going on and why there was such a fight in the first place, and they did not know where to find the people who should pay them. Tactically exploiting this confusion, supporters of the “new commission” pretended to belong to the “old commission” and asked to be led to meet the rest of the escaped fishes who could then be paid in person. “We found them in an Internet café,” Renheng, a senior member of the new commission told me,

> Some of these bastards hid the white caps in their crotches when they fled from the first confrontation. They were given these caps by the old commission in order to pass for Hui, and these caps are the proof of participation they need to present later for receiving their payment. We were so mad that we roped all of them back to the mosque, closed the door behind us, and beat them like we beat dogs (*guanmen dagou*).

The intensity of the fight could hardly be overstated. But it is important to notice that this fight has gone much beyond an infighting within the Hui – the Han were introduced and exploited as mercenaries, hired purely to win a battle which was not their own. The new commission professes that this battle is for the sake of religion. In their view, the old commission has not done enough and has remained largely slothful in responding to the new changes in the world. “They take the mosque as their private property, and divide the profits only among themselves,” Mabo, another member of the new commission, told me, “but the mosque is the property of all Muslims, and the money should be used completely and exclusively for the development of Islam.” One figure of the “old commission,” Zhenxuan, had been accused – first by members of the “new commission” and then by the district government who received the report filed by the former – of embezzlement in the management of the property owned by Garden Mosque. The amount of this misappropriation was fixed by those whom I interviewed at three hundred thousand RMB, while many also insisted that he had a much larger bank account whose source also remained suspicious. The intervention of the state is seen as necessary in sorting out property relations and in punishing economic misconduct, to the point where the police, often considered by the local Hui to be disruptive of the normal operation of the mosque, is seen as embodying social justice. Zhenxuan was put under arrest at the time of my work and “after this arrest, the old commission are finally giving in,” as Chunguang told me. The fight, presumed to be for the purpose of religion, is nonetheless framed in terms of a struggle to control the property of Garden and to punish those who have not diverted its use in the direction desired by those supporting the “new commission.” “You cannot

develop religion without money, so we must gain control of every single piece of the property." Chunguang said determinedly.

The position of Imam Han, however, is more complicated in this situation. Being the leading cleric in Garden Mosque, Imam Han is a particularly experienced figure who had studied and travelled widely in the Middle East, spending much of his time working in Kuwait to proselytize Islam to the Chinese migrant workers who had been recruited and then exported by China's state and private construction corporations to work on large-scale road and bridge projects in the Gulf countries. Actively spreading Saudi Wahhabism in his own mosque due to his experience in the Middle East, Han is constantly on the radar of local police surveillance and was put under house arrest for two months after 9/11. "The government always accuses me of intervening in secular affairs," he said, "but it is *my* mosque that has been smashed. How can I stay away from this? There are no secular affairs in a mosque – all affairs are religious affairs. How can I not intervene?" As to the most ideal position of clerical power in a mosque, Imam Han resorted to the pre-Communist history which he well remembered was told him by his teachers,

> Previously the imams had the highest power in a mosque. Everyone had to listen to them. However wealthy and powerful you might be in your profane life, in the mosque, you must submit to the rules and suggestions of the imams. There were of course people who frequented the mosque and tried to offer their helping hands in managing the mosque together with the imams. But these people were not independent, and they could not make decisions on their own. Their decisions must be certified by the imams in order to be effective and the clerical power could easily veto these decisions and come up with a judgment completely independently.

Although this account might have exaggerated the extent of clerical authority in a mosque before the Communist takeover, it nonetheless does not depart considerably from

what was the case at least in the Republican period. An informal committee consisting primarily of local gentry, headed by an elite member, often assisted the clerics who were almost invariably not rooted in the local world bur hired as an outsider from elsewhere to work in the communal mosque (Xue, 1930; Communique, 1930; G. Wang, 1931). The head of this committee bore one of three interchangeable titles: *shetou* or *sheshou*, meaning "head of the collective," and *xuedong*, "chair of the studies," which refers more particularly to the function of the committee in funding the local madrassa held in the mosque. These names are still used among many Hui I have known in my fieldwork, but those who bear this title do not necessarily assume the more official role as director of the state-recognized commission. The degree of divergence between the informal concentration of power and the formal position as the legal representative of the mosque to whom the state speaks at an official register varies across space and time and depends largely upon negotiations and compromises reached purely on a local basis. But a strong tendency nonetheless exists that the *shetou*/*sheshou*/*xuedong* are increasingly marginalized and replaced by the officially recognized power of the director, for the main reason which Chunguang already pointed out in a most matter-of-fact manner: "You cannot develop religion without money." Only the director has the legal power to decide, together with other members of the commission, how the property of the mosque can be utilized to generate funds for maintaining the normal operation of the mosque. A *sheshou* might have popular support on his side, but any of his actions that touch on mosque property might be accused of theft or even embezzlement. The local mosque is no longer a civil space governed purely by popular consensus, but a space saturated with state laws and administrative regulations. The displacement of *shetou*/*sheshou*/*xuedong* and the

deposition of clerical power from its authoritative place in the mosque are two sides of the same coin and happen simultaneously with the rise of the commission which carries the certifying seal of the state on its forehead.

The state codification of the "democratic management" of the mosque, by solidifying a separation between the clerical and the lay power which previously existed only partially and informally within the mosque, effects a fundamental shift which largely transforms the organizational arrangement of the mosque as the basic institution by means of which Hui Islam gains traction both in the urban and the rural areas. In the rural mosques which I visited during my fieldwork, it is not uncommon to find a noticeable overlap in the personnel that manage the village mosque and the members of the village party committee. This convergence is not coincidental and it might even reach such a point where the village party secretariat is meanwhile director of the commission for managing the communal mosque. Despite the party policy that forbids its members from professing any religious belief, a party secretariat could nonetheless be the head in managing the local mosque, since the commission, although consisting primarily of Hui Muslims, is still a secular body performing definitively secular functions. The Muslim status of the Hui secretariat always remains obscure, and the condition for this obscurity not being revealed and thematized is precisely the secular nature of the commission to which he serves as the head.[24] The mosque is turned in this way into a site for communal

[24] An additional dimension that pertains to this question should also be mentioned. In the official document issued by the Department of Organization of the CCP's Central Committee in 1991 which addresses specifically the question of religious acts among party members, it is emphatically proposed that a distinction be rigorously maintained between "religious activities" and "ethnic customs and folklores:" an ethnic party member, in order to remain connected to "his or her own people," should continue to participate in "marriage rituals and funerary rites" or other "ethnic festivities," which are not and cannot be seen as "religious activities" (Department of Organization, 1991). This politically imposed distinction has on the one hand enabled many Hui party members to continue to practice Hui Islam in the name of "ethnic

self-governance that centers not upon religious doctrines and clerical authority, but upon the actual physical presence of the mosque as a place that occupies a site in the spatio-temporal arrangement of the landscape, with its substantive property whose value varies according to its location and the political economic transformation of the landscape itself.

Hui clerics are not necessarily excluded from the commission, as I have intimated previously. But clerical power is *de jure* prohibited from acquiring influence in the commission. A well respected Hui imam might be willing to provide advice and his advice might be heeded by those in the commission, but this is entirely on an *ad hoc* basis and this influence is always based upon the "voluntary" decision of the commission as a secular body for communal self-governance. The possible participation of Hui clerics in the commission is not contradictory to the legally prescribed separation of the clerical and the lay power in the management of the local mosque.

Another critical consequence of this codification of "democratic management" has to do with the increasingly spectral presence of *fang* especially in the urban area. Both Journey Mosque and Garden Mosque, for instance, do not have an actual *fang* because the development of February 7th Square as a commercial district requires that any resident that might have settled around them be displaced and relocated. Even Northern Grand Mosque and Down Mosque, the two mosques that traditionally have the largest and most populous *fang*s in Zhengzhou, progressively lose the Hui population that used to live around them as waves of housing projects and urban development plans daily encroach upon their neighborhood. The boundary of their *fang*s becomes increasingly blurry –

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customs," and on the other, it has also effected what for many is an "ethnicization" of Islam that confines it entirely to the world of ethnic minorities. It is also this distinction that in part justifies the management of the village mosque by the party secretariat.

those living close by might not belong to the *fang* while those who do might live far removed from the mosque. The competition for entering the commission and for controlling mosque property for possible profiteering assumes a new form in this context. A commission election held at a particular mosque might bring in a huge crowd which is more of a show of the network of relations each candidate is able to mobilize for his own benefit. Due to the contradiction between the progressive dissolution of *fang* and its continual conceptual existence in the legal prescriptions that define the management of the mosque, this crowd that emerges on the election day (suppose the specific date for election is determined in advance and publicized among those who are interested – which is not always the case, as we have seen in the scenario that begins this chapter) segments along the lines drawn by the personal network of each candidate, and these factions do not overlap to produce any form of sociality that can endure the extension of space and time. Cronyism is not uncommon, as promises (sometimes true, sometimes false) are made that give to one's supporters the power to monopolize certain mosque properties for personal gains after one is elected to the designated position. Warehouses might be rented at a discounted price; the hotel might purchase its teabag from certain providers or outsource its laundry service to certain laundromats; or the future renovation of the mosque and the procurement of new facilities (loudspeakers, blankets, new furniture, etc.) might bring new business only to certain stores whose owners have showed up and cast their votes for the designated man. Bribery is an integral part of this "democratic procedure," because all state regulations only stipulate and codify a general democracy without offering any particular prescription as to how this local democracy should be specified and practiced as a workable process.

Almost all possible means are resorted to in this often all-out war among the Hui fighting to gain control of the communal property on which stands their local mosque. State intervention is not criticized as much as sought after, invited to crush one's adversary and to recognize one's own legitimacy in assuming the position in the newly "elected" commission. However much the "new commission" at Garden Mosque professes to work purely for Islam and declares their unreserved position in defending their religion in the face of state oppression, they cannot deny the fact that they cannot rise so fast and deal the definitive blow to the "old commission" without the help of the district government, with its power in assembling support from the police, the public prosecutor, and the court, all under the directorship of the district party committee for political and legal affairs (*zhengfawei*).

It is wrong to assume at this point that the local government is always posed in a position to actively intervene in "mosque affairs," as if it were always a question of oppression versus resistance, atheist communist state versus civil religious consciousness. Majie, a civil servant working in Guancheng District Bureau of Religious Affairs, was one of the government officials who were present at the election at Down Mosque with which I open this chapter. In his mid-30s and already experienced in managing the "religious and ethnic affairs" particularly among the Hui, Majie insisted that their way of doing things, i.e. arbitrarily picking a time, dropping by a mosque after one of the daily prayers (*not* Jumu'ah), making the people then and there cast their votes and accepting the result as effective and authoritative, was necessitated by the chaotic disorder that often accompanies such elections within a *fang*. His view was corroborated by his supervisor Xiaojuan, chief of the bureau. "Only those who pray regularly in the mosque

can enter the commission," she said, "Otherwise, the mosque will be turned into a property people compete to gain control of. We must maintain a stable order." The state codification of an unspecified "democratic management" of the mosque has entailed a "big democracy" (*da minzhu*) or "over-democracy" (*guodu minzhu*) which paradoxically triggers among the local Hui living in a *fang* an often fierce competition that constantly risks spilling over the limit of infighting tolerable to and possibly desired by the state practicing a strategy of "divide and conquer." Both the local government and the quarreling Hui see the intervention of the state as necessary to restore an "order" which is conducive to both, although for different reasons: for the former, social stability is of paramount importance; for the latter, the state is seduced to buttress one's own candidature and to disgrace one's opponents. The state maintains a sustained presence in the mosque, and this presence cannot be reduced purely to an intrusion resented by all Hui living in the same *fang* and praying in the same communal mosque.

Conclusion

To a certain extent, this chapter does not approach Hui Islam in a direct manner. It has not studied how the Hui define their particular practices in substantiating the abstract teaching of the Islamic religion (more on this in chapters 3 and 4), and I have deliberately left out the countless sermons which were often delivered to me as I first visited the mosques that appear in this chapter. To the contrary, I attend to their occasional complaints and the kind of "marginal trivia" which they would rather hide from outsiders and are considered by them to be merely secondary compared to the much grander aspiration to continuously sustain and perhaps even to spread the true faith in the Sino-centric Han world. I am less interested in what they would love to do than in the obstacles

that constantly trip them up and prevent them from smoothly realizing their aspiration. I often heard criticisms of selfishness and pursuit of economic gain as manifestations of the lack of sincere faith, but instead of following these dismissive criticisms, I take those actions criticized seriously and probe the political, economic, and legal conditions that institute a space in which "selfishness" and the "pursuit of economic gain" can act themselves out and perhaps even get intensified by the logic of this space itself. A mosque is a physical presence inscribed in a complex landscape whose configuration has undergone progressive and increasingly rapid changes in the past three decades in China, and Hui Islam cannot be detached from this nitty-gritty world. What I have attempted to do in this chapter is to effect a focalization that moves us slightly away from an exclusive focus on "religion" (as if there is such a thing called "religion" which can be abstracted from its institutional existence) and attends to the often unthematized but daily experienced – experienced as annoying interruptions to a world supposed to be purely about faith – complications that constantly pull one back into a world that is so noisy that it risks drowning the very voice of the imam standing on the minaret calling the faithful to assemble for prayer.

For every single time the dramatic story that happened at Garden Mosque was recounted in my presence, either for me or for others, the one who narrated always began with "they first smashed the security camera." Several days after this event while I was sitting with members of the "new commission" who were still trying to think of ways to completely push the "old commission" out of the way, a team of technicians came in and asked whether someone had ordered a new set of surveillance cameras. Mabo directed them to the very position where the old camera used to be installed, and the "new

commission" had decided, as a matter of fact, to add the total number of cameras in Garden Mosque. Even before they began to fix any of the rest, they must first of all be able to subject every corner of the mosque to an anxious seeing, and to prepare for any future violent intrusion which they believed would again begin with "smashing the security camera."

The transformation especially of the urban landscape and the state codification of the "democratic management" of the mosque have therefore rendered urban mosques (rural mosques to a lesser extent, depending largely upon the local political economy – which is why in rural areas experiencing rapid urbanization, similar predicaments can also be observed) into a local space constantly subject to a continuous and intense gaze. For those who are interested in managing the mosque and in possibly acquiring personal gains in the course of this management, everyone is watching everyone else, and direct confrontation, however much one would prefer to hide it behind apparent etiquette, is often exposed to broad daylight and become topics for conversations both in the *fang* and beyond. The event at Garden Mosque travelled as far as to Changzhi in Shanxi Province (about four hours' drive from Zhengzhou), carried by Zhengzhou imams visiting their old classmates in the madrassa. And even the older and no less dramatic story of one Caosi chasing his opponent out of Garden with a sharp knife still circulated widely among those who remembered it at the time of my fieldwork. These stories, while being recounted, are often scoffed at, or at least frowned upon, but I submit that they are perhaps more important than the countless sermons I heard which often appear to me to float merely in midair and which almost invariably fade in the face of the dense quarrels I have studied in this chapter. Because of the economic and legal transformations in the past three

decades, the mosque is rendered into a keenly exposed and intensely seen public space which does not bind the local Hui together as much as divide them up by giving them the opportunity to capitalize on communal property whose value has risen exponentially thanks to economic liberalization after the Cultural Revolution. The formation of a communal public, marked by open competition and anxiously pursued visibility, does not necessarily imply the probable appearance of communal solidarity. It is fundamentally a question of the emergence of a sociological space by and through the mosque that this chapter is interested in, and this space is deeply entrenched in the general socio-economic, political, and legal changes in China in the past three decades. Perhaps we might argue that the surviving bastion of Hui Islam in contemporary China, i.e. the mosque, *is* precisely this sociological space saturated with disputes and occasionally violent confrontations – but none of these, let's note, is the direct result of "religion," and Islam as a religious system in fact only has limited purchase in these apparently trivial yet profoundly influential conflicts.

Part I

CHAPTER 3

The True Believer Does Not Know

Every Wednesday night at the Jahriyya Sufi Banqiao *daotang* ("the hall of Dao"), located in the rural town of Banqiao on the outskirts of the city of Wuzhong in Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, a particularly important ritual would be solemnly and exactingly performed among a group of Jahriyya Sufi Hui sitting in a rectangular circle known as *dayi'er*.[25] The ritual is marked by a dignified silence, except for a few vocal recitations of commonly used expressions in the praise of God (e.g. Allahamdu lilliahi – all praise to Allah). These voiced praises are chanted in long and melodious tones, often accentuated at the beginning (the word "Allah" is invariably vocalized), and the voice gradually fades out as the reciter moves to the end of the sentence. In accompaniment of each of these highly conventionalized utterances, a pebble will be dropped in a small wooden box by the particular reciter from whom the words emanate. The perceptible change of volume in the vocal recitation creates a strong rhythm followed closely by the very hand that drops the pebble as the recitation is vocalized – one raises the pebble as

[25] It is said among the Jahriyya followers that a *dayi'er* is "a circle for the praise of Allah (*zanzhu de quanzi*)" and "a garden in the Heaven" (Wang, 2009, pp. 7, 12). Those who have cleansed themselves in preparation for *dayi'er* must restrain themselves from speaking, as silence is here seen as a necessity for maintaining ritual purity.

one is at "Allah," and the sound of the pebble touching the bottom of the wooden box nicely complements the silence as one reaches the end of "lilliahi."

There are altogether one hundred such white pebbles, all of the same size and well-polished due to years of repetitive ritual usage. It is firmly believed by the Jahriyya Sufi Hui that these pebbles were initially brought to China and passed down through a line of saints by their first and miraculous master Ma Mingxin, whose legendary journey to Yemen is thought to lie at the fountainhead of the mystic teaching of Jahriyya Sufism.[26] The pebbles fulfill a particularly critical function in *Panchi Shanpan*, as the ritual is named, knowingly after the Persian word for Thursday, *Panj Shan Beh* (the sunset on Wednesday is thought to indicate the beginning of Thursday). Every drop of pebble in the wooden box, in tandem with the partially vocal praise of Allah, marks the completion of a set number of praises and the recitation of specific Quranic verses by the particular reciter. The number of people sitting in the rectangular *dayi'er* may vary, but insofar as the pebbles are distributed (not necessarily evenly) among those who participate in the rite, the total number of praises and recitations will remain constant. The silent nature of the ritual makes this counting function of the pebbles particularly important – no one else can know how many times one has recited certain verses and whether one has performed the required steps crucial for the collective consummation of the rite. The sound of the pebble dropping – a crisp and clear sound breaking through the solemn silence that engulfs the *dayi'er* (this sharp contrast in sound punctuates the progression of the ritual

[26] For the history of Jahriyya Sufism and its complex relationship with other Sufi orders both in China and beyond, see Ma, 2000b, 2000a, 1991; Zhang, 1990; Yang, 2010; Ye, 2009; Fletcher, 1972; Fletcher & Manz, 1995; Lipman, 1997, 1981.

and is an integral part of it) – is the only sign by the indication of which other participants could assume that one has indeed performed one's designated role.

But the extent of secrecy goes even deeper. What specific verses one particular participant recites and how many times they should be recited are not always known to other members of the *dayi'er*. A high priest (or *reyisi*, as his title is named in Jahriyya Sufism, and this is exclusively a male position) is given the clerical authority by the still living saint of the order to lead this ritual in a particular *daotang*. He is a local proxy seen as a sign that stands in for the saint and who therefore could reflect the beam of light that emanates solely from the saint, or *murshid* ("the guidance"), who is thought to be a "secret friend" (*miyou*) of God able to mediate between the Lord of All Worlds and the particularly human world in which the Jahriyya Sufi Hui live. A *reyisi* might possess more knowledge than other members of the *dayi'er* in regard to the minute details of the ritual, but his authority is not fundamentally defined by a monopoly on knowledge. He is qualified to preside over the ritual only because he has the *kouhuan* (permission) of the *murshid*, and it is not him who decides who shall recite what and how this recitation should be performed in silence. Neither is it a necessity that he must understand every single detail of the rite in order for him to be able to lead its performance. Some members of the *dayi'er* might have adopted their recitations from a secret teaching that connects them directly and exclusively to the *murshid* and no one else could ever know the substantive content of this teaching. Secrecy is a crucial component of *Panchi Shanpan*, and silence is merely one manifestation – and a literal one at that – of this more general theme that defines every aspect of it.

All details of this ritual are seen by Jahriyya Sufi Hui to possess cosmic mysteries that deserve lifelong meditation. Laoma, a devout Jahriyya disciple who had been a participant of the ritual for over thirty years, was still unsure of the exact meanings of many apparently nonsensical arrangements which are nonetheless critical components of *Panchi Shanpan* –

> The rite was performed at night, and we have the *daotang* so well lighted as if it is daytime. But still, two candles will be placed on the table around which the *dayi'er* sits. We don't read anything, and the hall is already bright. Why this redundancy? Why this emphasis on light to the point where it seems to be unnecessary?

Laoma's bewilderment cannot be dissipated by recourse to an explanation that compares light to philosophical and theological illumination, a typical interpretation that takes its cue from the ancient tradition of Islamic illuminationism often attributed to Shahab al-Din Suhrawardi (1155–1191) and Al-Ghazālī (1058-1111).[27] It is not light itself as much as the redundancy, the apparently unnecessary doubling, that he finds puzzling and curious. If the desire for light and illumination is a commonplace among most Sufi, the detail of redundancy, however, cannot be subsumed completely under this desire (unless when this desire is defined by a fundamental insatiability): we need light, but why so much? And what is that light which we want if this redoubling supplementation is seen as an intrinsic attribute of this light itself (i.e. light not supplemented is not and can never be bright enough)? Furthermore, since "we are not reading," why do we need this light when it seems to be of little use and when all members of the *dayi'er* would close their eyes and rhythmically move their bodies as they silently perform their recitations? Why so

[27] For the philosophical illuminationism of Suhrawardi, see Suhrawardi, Walbridge, & Ziai, 1999. For Al-Ghazali's reading of light in connection to Sufi mysticism, see Al-Ghazali, 1998. For general introductions to the Islamic theological and philosophical tradition of illuminationism, see Nasr & Leaman, 1996, pp. 465-96; Nasr & Razavi, 1996, pp. 125-71.

much light in a ritual that could well be conducted in darkness, when, in fact, it *is* conducted precisely at night time?

Repetition and supplementation function not merely to point to the possible insatiability of the desire for light and illumination among the Jahriyya Hui. It also effects an enframing that produces the condition for mystification – light would not be rendered into a sign seen by Laoma to possess an immense representative power without the apparently redundant doubling that pulls the light as a familiar trope in Sufism out of the familiarity in which it is often located and by which it is often explained. The pure representability of light as a sign emerges precisely at the moment when Laoma starts to wonder why *so much* light is needed in *Panchi Shanpan*.

The same theme of ostensible supplementation can be observed in the ritual use of the white pebbles as well. Although their total number is one hundred, only ninety-nine is actually used in punctuating the silent recitations, and the remaining one is always dropped *before* those in the *dayi'er* officially initiate *Panchi Shanpan*. One member will divide the pebbles as all others quietly get prepared for the rite, and he would kiss the one pebble to be dropped beforehand in the same way the Quran is often kissed. But why, if this extra and somewhat superfluous pebble has every time to be dropped before the rite, did not the miraculous master Ma Mingxin leave it out in the first place and only pass the remaining ninety-nine to his pious followers? Why did he choose to keep this apparently useless supplement? I asked Laoma these questions. Somehow cornered, he did not reply to them directly. Instead, he set out to offer me a story –

> There was once a Sufi master with three students. The master was approaching his death and he summoned his students to his deathbed.

> They were lost as much as sad. “Where should we find our next teacher?” They asked. And the master, breathing softly, gave his instructions: “I have 17 sheep. Such a man as can divide these sheep in the following way will be your next teacher: he can give 1/2 of them to the oldest of the three of you, 1/3 to the middle one, and 1/9 to the youngest.” Now, do you know how this can be done?

After a short silence during which I was trying to figure out whether he was merely posing a rhetorical question, Laoma continued,

> You add one and make it 18. 1/2 of 18 is 9, 1/3 6, and 1/9 2. 9 plus 6 plus 2 is 17, not 18. Now where is that extra one? Has the new master indeed added it? But how could he divide the 17 sheep without adding that extra one? Where is it after the division is completed? Do you know? *Can* you know?

My questions were not answered as much as reposed. They were shot back to me in a manner that only deepened the degree of curiosity to the point where the very answerability of these questions begins to constitute a question in itself. In the same way the candles enframe light and the extra pebble enframes the remaining ninety-nine “useful” ones, the remarkable allegory recounted by Laoma also enframes my questions and effectively assimilates them into the internal logic of the weekly *Panchi Shanpan* marked by apparent redundancy, repetition, and supplementation.

The logic of the “extra” is directly linked to the figure of the *murshid* – it is he who leaves behind the extra pebble as a sign for his disciples to ponder. It is also he who creates that impressive mathematical trick in which the extra sheep is both part and no part of the total number to be divided among the three students. He does not deliberately keep a substantive secret which has a content that can be revealed and taught as much as constitutes a figure that actively re-enchants the world by rendering the familiar strange, and by transforming the mundane into the mysterious. He does not answer as much as create a situation in which one is constantly led to ask and to wonder. Both

supplementation and mystification (as a result of the enframing effected by supplementation) refer back to the inherent miraculousness of the *murshid* who does not possess the ultimate secret as much as renders the world itself into a secret. It is by and through him – invariably a male figure – that the world acquires that aura which orients the life of a pious Jahriyya Sufi.

In this chapter, I am primarily interested in how the institution of *murshid* and of secrecy as an intrinsic and crucial component of Islamic sainthood creates a form of being Hui Muslim and a way of sustaining Hui Islam in China different from what we have seen in the confined space of a mosque and its *fang* in the previous chapter. If a mosque – especially an urban mosque – as a site for "religious activity" nonetheless constitutes a place where a largely secular and anxiously exposed communal public emerges that displaces clerical power and religious concern with local disputes involving property relations, secrecy in Sufism entails a strong solidarity among the members of a particular Sufi order due principally to the nature of the relationship that binds each follower to his or her *murshid*. The relationship far exceeds the limit of a *fang* and is based precisely upon the opposite of public exposure. If in Zhengzhou it is a disputed public space ridden with open competition and at times violent confrontation that forms the basic institutional structure that maintains the presence of Hui Islam in the Sino-centric social world, in those parts of northwest China where Sufism reigns supreme among the Hui, it is secrecy and the binding of oneself to one's own *murshid* that fulfill in a completely different way a similar function. It is at the level of institution (instead of individual Hui Muslim) that I have studied the mosque and will continue in this chapter to study Hui Sufism, of which Jahriyya is merely one – although one particularly

significant and influential – variation. Due to the fact that my ethnographic fieldwork on Sufism was conducted primarily in Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, especially in those areas (the town of Banqiao in Wuzhong and the village of Honglefu in Qingtongxia) where the most prevalent Sufi order is Jahriyya (with its still powerful organizational force unrivalled in most – but not all – other relatively smaller and more segmented orders), what follows will necessarily be limited by this geographical and sectarian focus. But despite irreducible differences in terms of ritual details and the substantive content of genealogies of sainthood ("silsila," as it is often called in Sufism), most Sufi orders in Ningxia which I have studied to different extent do share similar institutional structures that all center upon the *murshid*, the saint who is seen to body forth the sacred line of Dao in contemporary times and who reflects the beam of light that ultimately emanates from the inaccessible God. It is this common institutional structure that I propose to discuss in this chapter.

A Gendered Genealogy of Dao

Just as the solemn place for Sufi meditation and mystic ritual is called *daotang* ("the hall of Dao") in northwest China, the institution of Sufi order also bears a proper name in Chinese, *menhuan*. The literal meaning of *huan* is elite, with a strong implication of imperial official connections, while the word *men* simply means door, indicating a sense of entry and threshold. *Menhuan* is a reversal of the more common noun *huanmen*, which is often used to describe an enormously influential elite family with a grand genealogy consisting of a long list of prominent imperial officials and which therefore possesses much political capital in landing its current members in eminent positions. One born into a *huanmen* is born into power and wealth, a good literary education and a highly

promising political career buttressed by intimate familial connections. The first recorded use of *menhuan* to designate a Sufi order in China initially appeared in a memorial sent in 1897 to the Guangxu Emperor of late Qing Dynasty (1644-1911 A.D.) by Yang Zengxin, then the governor of Hezhou (now known as Linxia Hui Autonomous Prefecture, Gansu Province) who was later the dictator that ruled with an iron fist the Uyghur Xinjiang for seventeen years in early Republican period, turning it practically into his own personal kingdom. Yang chose to name the Sufi orders thus with a particular purpose: he wanted to convey a sense of urgency and to convince the emperor that an immediate military operation was necessitated by the fact that the Hui Sufi order, with its hereditary inheritance of both clerical and secular power attached to the position of the mystic *murshid* and its strong force in mobilizing large numbers of followers in a highly organized manner for either civil or military purpose, constituted a grave threat to the imperial rule and might at any moment rebel against the Qing Dynasty already much weakened after the two Opium Wars (1839-1842, 1856-1860) (Ma, 2000b, pp. 75; Li & Ma, 2011, pp. 33-4). *Menhuan*, therefore, is not a self-designation of the Sufi Hui at the very beginning, and it does not describe as much as deliberately portrays the Hui Sufi orders in negative terms in order to invite political oppression and military elimination.

In spite of this initial attempt on the side of an imperial official to subject Hui Sufi orders to suppression, *menhuan* has nonetheless over the years been accepted by most Sufi Hui as the designation by which they explain to outsiders the kind of social organization that defines their practice of faith. Although it is often established in academic literature that there are four major Sufi *menhuan* in China (Khufiyya, Jahriyya, Qadiriyya, Kuburiyya) (Gladney, 1991, pp. 41-53; 1987, pp. 503; Dillon, 1999, pp. 113-

129), the term *menhuan* does not necessarily imply the specific organizational level at which a particular *menhuan* might be situated. Khufiyya is called a *menhuan*, but the countless Sufi orders that only claim a nominal and largely formal affiliation with the Khufiyya order are not located in a well-organized intra-Khufiyya hierarchy and do not form any strong solidarity among themselves. Each particular Khufiyya order also calls itself a *menhuan*, without reserving this name only for a general and organizationally non-existent Khufiyya order unified as a singular group with one *murshid* as its exclusive guide. Hongmen *menhuan*, initiated by Hong Shoulin (d. 1937) and with its followers living primarily in Tongxin, Haiyuan and Guyuan counties in Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, claims to belong to the Khufiyya *menhuan*, but it remains organizationally independent and the power – both clerical and secular, as they are often not distinguished in a Sufi *menhuan* – of its *murshid* is lodged safely in the hands of the Hong family, whose most recent inheritor is Hong Yang, an extraordinary and shrewd leader in his late forties. The specific interpretation given to *menhuan* by Hongmen demonstrates how this name acquires its particular traction among the Sufi Hui despite its initially external imposition: "*Menhuan* is the *men* ("door") for a Muslim to recognize Allah. Anyone can go through this door, but there must be a guide, and this guide is the *laorenjia* ("the old sage," a different name often used interchangeably with *murshid*). One can eventually cross the threshold only on three conditions: the call (*zhaohuan*) of Allah, the lead of the *laorenjia*, and personal discipline (*gongxiu*). This is the true meaning of *menhuan* as seen from inside the religion" (Ma, 2000b, pp. 218).

In addition to this flexibility of *menhuan* in designating Sufi orders of different levels and of different degrees of organizational existence, not all Sufi orders in China call

themselves *menhuan*. The "door" might exist, but it is not necessarily named. And the *murshid* might not want to reveal his name and might prefer precisely to remain hidden and confined within a small circle of close disciples. Luojie came from a family whose history had produced one such unnaming *murshid*. Her great grandfather was a Sufi master belonging to the Qadiriyya order (also segmented into a variety of smaller *menhuan*s without a unified organization)[28] and was one of three most promising students of an eminent *murshid* known to be able to perform long meditation and produce fabulous miracles. "My great grandfather (*taiyeye*) was in fact the best of the three, and he certainly could have established his own *menhuan*, just like what the other two did." But Luojie did not feel sorry for her *taiyeye*. Regret, amazingly, was a word I never heard from her in the countless conversations we had when I was in Ningxia. She continued to explain why her *taiyeye* did not choose to name his own "door" (to name the "door" and to establish one's own *menhuan* are in this case one and the same thing – the act of naming *is* the act of establishment) –

> He could have done it. But he said, "it's enough that I look after my own descendants – that's enough trouble. I cannot have my own *menhuan*. I am not able to look after so many." You know what? He was absolutely right! Among all his descendants, only those descending from my own grandfather are good. You cannot imagine what the others are doing. Many are drug dealers, others in gangs. Indeed, that's enough trouble for *taiyeye*!

Luojie was the youngest daughter in her family, with her father long passed away and her relationship with her mother far from gratifying. She often recollected to me – in the same tone of admiration in which she narrated to me the story of her *taiyeye* – how gentle and generous a male figure her father was. A successful businessman nonetheless

[28] Luojie's family belongs to the Shitangling *menhuan* of the Qadiriyya order. For a history of Shitangling and its relationship to other Qadiriyya *menhuan*s, see Ma, 2006.

untainted by the unrestrained desire for profit, her father often left the family well maintained. “He was always smiling, and whenever I turned to him for support, he was invariably on my side. He did not talk much – but you could feel it. As to my mom, she is a hysteric.” After this short comment, she again moved back to the patrilineal line,

> I am always confident. I think all the bad things cannot hurt me. My friends and colleagues often wonder how I can be happy all the time. I know my *taiyeye* is protecting me. I know he is looking after me. I went to college in Beijing and got my PhD in a prestigious university. While I was wondering if I could get a job, an opportunity turned up and took me back to Yinchuan. Now I have a decent job and am getting ready for a new marriage! It is as if everything has been so well arranged for me in advance, as if someone has always been looking after me. I think it’s *taiyeye*. I am never alone.

But *taiyeye* could not protect her from all adversities –

> Every time I went back home – I mean every time, I will get sick for a couple of days. I will just keep vomiting, but nothing comes out. Every single time, exactly the same symptom. We have a theory in our village – if such vomiting happens, it means you are being looked at by the ghost of a deceased close relative. The closer you are, the more severe the symptom, because the ghost simply keeps staring at you. They are reluctant to move their gaze away. They love you so much, but they don’t know that by looking at you, they unwittingly hurt you. The *yinqi* (air of *yin* – a Daoist conception prevalent in China’s Han popular religious traditions) is simply too strong and you cannot bear it. I think it’s my father. He wants to see me, and he wants to see me all the time. He could not get enough of me every time I am at home. But I just cannot stand my mom…

It is always a patronym that proclaims the establishment of a new Sufi order, and even when this act of naming is not explicitly performed, the implicit structure of an unnamed *menhuan* is nonetheless heavily defined by this exclusive reliance upon patriliny. Luojie strongly identifies with her *taiyeye*, and the latter’s inability in protecting her from her father’s insatiable gaze does not contradict this identification as much as carrying it to a different level where it is not *taiyeye* as much as a generalized yet apparently so intimate

patronym with which she identifies: "*taiyeye* could not protect me from this, because this is not one of those bad things that can hurt you. It's your own father, it's the love, the care, the impossibility of parting with one's closest family. Who can intervene to ameliorate this?"

Taiyeye does have a small *gongbei* (a tomb dedicated to a Sufi saint, also a site or a "shrine" for commemoration and meditation for the followers of the saint interred) built for him by his family and the small circle of disciples who knew his teaching. There are many such nameless *gongbei*s in Ningxia – perhaps exceeding the number of the named ones (this is, however, purely a guess ventured by those whom I interviewed without any statistical evidence). Some of these *gongbei*s are located right next to the highway (the highway is often the latecomer), while a significant number dot the deep mountains of Ningxia, almost invariably in the rural area. They are built and maintained only by those who either in person or through familial connections remember and still actively uphold the teaching of the Sufi master to whom the tomb is dedicated. These *gongbei*s are not, however, sites of purely local commemoration. A Sufi Hui who belongs to one of the many *menhuan*s often considers him or herself as "a person of *menhuan*," or more commonly, "a person who has passed the door" (*menli de ren*). This identification with *menhuan* in general – instead of any particular *menhuan* – is substantiated only at the site of a nameless *gongbei*, when the apparent lack of the written patronym occludes the recollection of concrete memories that easily lead one away from a calm meditation. To visit a *gongbei* known to belong to a *menhuan* that is not one's own is a provocative proclamation of betrayal that is seen by one's fellow *menhuan* followers as the ultimate violation.

But no one, at least none of those whom I interviewed, seems to have a problem with visiting nameless *gongbei*s. It is not a particular saint as much as sainthood itself that is seen to be the object for commemoration. Each of these small *gongbei*s invariably has a table upon which stands a small incense bowl. Packs of incense sticks and matches are often placed right next to the bowl for the convenience of the commemorators. These supplies are daily refilled by the family or the local disciples of the commemorated saint precisely for those who pass by and would like to spend a few quiet minutes in silent meditation. The generalization of *menhuan* identity happens only on the basis of this anonymity, and somewhat paradoxically, the lack of a particular patronym induces the abstraction and ultimate realization of the rule of the patronym in general. Being a promising young scholar in Ningxia University of Medicine and working on the topic of "Hui medicine" with a strong interest in Ibn Sīnā, Luojie was most interested in these nameless *gongbei*s: "The well-known ones are still there, but they are already dead in spirit. Most of their descendants, like those of the two fellow disciples of my great grandfather, have lost their true faith. I am now only interested in these small *gongbei*s – they are where the true Dao can still be found."

Two kinds of remembrance therefore have to be distinguished before we move on to a discussion of the named *menhuan*s. One kind remembers a particular genealogy with specific names attributed to locatable sites. This substantive memory distinguishes those who thus remember from followers of other *menhuan*s and draw sharp distinctions between and among different *menhuan*s. The prominence of names and named places marks the moral geography imagined and constantly sustained by this memory. This segmenting remembrance shifts into a general identification with *menhuan* as an abstract

conception precisely when the patronym is subtracted and sublimated in a hidden way. In this second form of remembrance, it is not a concrete history as much as a strong *consciousness* of history that acquires the highest significance. One can fully commit to the truth of Dao only when the substantive content of this Dao remains utterly inaccessible. The lack of a name of a father entails precisely the assertion of power of the Name of the Father.

For most named *menhuan*s, the scope of their influence goes far beyond the local rural world in which their central *daotang* is often situated. Followers of the Jahriyya order can be found in a wide range of places, from Ningxia, Gansu, and Xinjiang Provinces in northwest China, to Guizhou, Sichuan, Shandong, Heilongjiang, Henan, and Yunnan Provinces. Huasi *menhuan*, another prominent Sufi order in northwest China which claims an affiliation with the Khufiyya order, boasts at least two hundred thousand followers scattered in the four provinces of Gansu, Ningxia, Qinghai and Xinjiang. This broad distribution of *menhuan* followers across vast geographical distance is a direct reflection of two major factors: first, it points to the history of migration of the successive *murshid*s in the course of maintaining and spreading their mystic teaching in contradistinction to those propagated by their peers. This migration could be a result of clashes with local "older" forms of religious practice and might also be due to the impassioned invitation of pious followers who were willing to offer the best they could for the *murshid* in their own locale. The institutional existence of the teaching at a particular place does not disappear with the emigration of the *murshid*. A local representative (*reyisi* in Jahriyya) is often picked in person by the *murshid* himself and given objects of "proof" (*pingzheng*) that certify his qualification in temporarily and

partially standing in for the saint in conducting Sufi rituals and advising devout students. A subsidiary *daotang* (*fen daotang*) or mosque would be built on collective donations contributed completely by local followers who are under the specific clerical jurisdiction of their *reyisi* appointed single-handedly by the infallible *murshid*. This is repeated at every stop where the *murshid* sojourns to attract followers and train disciples. The trail of his journey is therefore dotted by numerous *daotang*s and mosques which, when taken together, form the nodes that weave a vast trans-local web.

The second factor that helps expand *menhuan* influence across long distance is forced expropriation and relocation imposed primarily by the suspicious imperial rulers. Different *menhuan*s, given their respective history, are influenced by this factor to different degrees. Its long history of violent confrontations with the Qing court since mid-18th century has particularly subjected Jahriyya *murshid*s and common disciples to consecutive purges and forced exiles, which largely explains its exceptionally wide distribution both in and beyond northwest China. For one example, Ma Datian, or *chuanchang taiye* ("the Shipyard Papa"), the third and one of the most respected *murshid*s in the genealogy kept by Jahriyya followers, was sent in 1817 on a long and drudging exile to Heilongjiang in Manchuria on the far tip of northeast China. Travelling confined in a wooden cage a distance almost humanly impossible, he persevered until his painful journey eventually ended at a place called Shipyard in Jilin. He was accompanied by twelve devout followers on his exile, who willfully surrendered themselves to the chain merely to stay on the side of their saint and to attend on him throughout the preposterous trip. *Chuanchang taiye* was survived by these pious disciples, who after his passing quietly built for him a simple and unadorned *gongbei* at the very site where he

acquired his martyrdom. The small number of Jahriyya followers now residing in Jilin trace their ancestry to these twelve brave disciples.

As perhaps common to most Sufi orders, tombs of saints also figure prominently in *menhuan*. Each particular *gongbei*, dedicated to one *murshid*, is also associated with a particular date which is often the death date of the interred saint. Not all commemorations of the past *murshid*s necessarily take place at the corresponding *gongbei*, since not all *gongbei*s (like the one dedicated to the Shipyard Papa in Jilin Province) are constructed in such a way as to accommodate such grand occasions. But visiting the respective *gongbei* on the correct date is regarded as highly important, although remote *gongbei*s might not receive as big a crowd as do others that are closer to the central *daotang*, where the commemoration ritual often takes place. In Jahriyya Sufism, all followers keep a calendar on which are marked the important dates when they have to travel and participate in the commemoration ritual either at the respective *gongbei* or in one of the central *daotang*s. One such detailed calendar reprinted in a pamphlet circulated among Jahriyya Hui is as follows – all dates are in the Chinese lunar calendar:

<u>January</u>

1st, Birth of Daozu Papa (Daozu, or "the ancestor of Dao," here designates Ma Mingxin, the founding *murshid* of Jahriyya Sufism.)

Passing (*guizhen*, "returning to the True Lord") of Daozu Taitai (wife of Daozu Papa)

13th, Passing of the Thirteenth Papa (This posthumous title is conferred upon Ma Hualong, the fifth *murshid* in the genealogy, in order to commemorate his date of death – a conventional way in giving posthumous names to passed *murshid*s among Jahriyya followers.)

14th, Passing of Dadongjia Papa (the oldest son of the Thirteenth Papa), Daren Papa (the second son of the Thirteenth Papa), Sandongjia Papa (the third

son of the Thirteenth Papa), Sidongjia Papa (the fourth son of the Thirteenth Papa, and father of the Old Papa)

20th, Passing of Chuanchang Taitai (wife of the Shipyard Papa)

25th, Passing of Bianliang Papa (Ma Jincheng, one of the two grandsons of the Thirteen Papa who narrowly escaped the imperial extermination in late Qing, the other being the Old Papa Ma Jinxi)

February

13th, Passing of Da Taitai (mother of Benguangyin Papa ["Papa of Present Times"], principal wife of the Tenth Papa)

17th, Passing of Xifu Taitai (concubine of the Thirteenth Papa, a Han woman much admired among Jahriyya Hui who unanimously think that it was her Han identity that enabled her to escape the massacre of Qing troops and to secretly smuggle out the sacred *yizhazi* [the objects seen as "proofs" that certify the authenticity of sainthood, passed down from Daozu Papa and successively into the hands of every succeeding *murshid*], thus preserving the continuity of Jahriyya Sufism at the very moment it risked irrevocable breaking)

19th, Birth of Pingliang Papa (Mu Xianzhang, the second *murshid* in the genealogy)

March

9th, Passing of the Seven Members of the Thirteenth Papa's Family, Including Old Papa's Mother

27th, Passing of Daozu Papa

April

8th, Passing of the April 8th Papa (Ma Yide, the fourth *murshid*)

14th, Passing of San Taitai (wife of Old Papa, mother of the Tenth Papa)

28th, Passing of Qi Papa

May

21st, Passing of Lintao Taitai (another wife of the Thirteenth Papa, mother of the Dadongjia Papa)

27th, Passing of Pingliang Papa

June

6th, Birth of Papa of Present Times (Ma Guoquan, the current *murshid*)

9th, Passing of the Tenth Papa (Ma Teng'ai, the seventh *murshid*, father of Papa of Present Times)

July

13th, Elevation of the Old Papa in the Hierarchy of Dao (Ma Jinxi, the sixth *murshid*, father of the Tenth Papa)

21st, Birth of the Old Papa

August

15th, Birth of the April 8th Papa

23rd, Birth of Shipyard Papa (Ma Datian, the third *murshid*)

September

6th, Passing of Shipyard Papa

October

8th, Birth of the Tenth Papa

22nd, Passing of Baishui Gutaitai (daughter of Pingliang Papa)

November

4th, Passing of the April 8th Taitai (wife of the April 8th Papa)

16th, Imprisonment of the Thirteenth Papa by Qing troops

22nd, Passing of the Old Papa

December

15th, Birth of the Thirteenth Papa

28th, Passing of Bianliang Papa

(J. Ma, 2010, pp. 255-6)

Not all dates thus marked out on the calendar are necessarily accompanied by a commemoration ritual, and we should take care to remember that these dates are given essentially different weight in the world of Jahriyya Sufism. Some – especially those dedicated to female figures who appear primarily due to their subsidiary role in serving the cause of their husbands or fathers – are singled out merely to gesture to the relative

importance of the respective figure, and visitations can take place all year along without being confined exclusively to the designated date. Women are not forbidden from entering the *gongbei* and offering their prayers to the interred saint, although when they attend the commemoration ritual in one of the central *daotang*s, they are invariably prohibited from entering the prayer hall and often have to kneel down in the courtyard outside the door that separates the men from the women and prioritizes the former over the latter. The segregation of sexes is much less marked in *gongbei*s than in both *daotang*s and mosques.

But the above calendar is only a partial list, and the genealogy it charts out is not unanimously accepted by all Jahriyya Hui. The pedigree of Dao bifurcates after Ma Hualong (the Thirteenth Papa), whose significance in the history of Jahriyya is easily recognizable in the above genealogy. His execution by the Qing court in late 19th century initiated the first major dispute among Jahriyya followers as to who were qualified to carry on the teaching passed down by the Daozu Papa. The hereditary logic that all accepted in spite of disagreements in the specific choice was a strong patriliny. The patriarchal tone of the genealogy can be discerned even on the surface: women are not excluded as much as domesticated. They appear either as wives or as daughters. Although Xifu Taitai is much respected and her tomb constitutes a major site in the moral geography of Jahriyya Sufism annually receiving an enormous amount of devout visitors, not a single one of those whom I interviewed know her name. She always goes with the suffix *taitai*, which literally means "wife." The particular historical juncture (late 19th century when the Qing Dynasty was only years away from its fall in the face of Western colonial power and the revolutionary passion brewing among the discontented Han

nationalists) in which she is seen to be situated only – and paradoxically – reinforces this domestication precisely in the form of accentuating her importance for the survival and continual existence Jahriyya Sufism. In his immensely influential book[29] – the very first of its kind – on the history of Jahriyya Sufism, Zhang Chengzhi, an eminent Hui writer who turned to Jahriyya after his revolutionary zeal was frustrated by the Tiananmen Massacre in 1989, wrote a three-paged chapter on Xifu Taitai, with the provocatively succinct title "Woman" –

> The link between Jahriyya and the history of modern China is established by a woman.
>
> And, she's a Han woman…
>
> According the memory of some old Jahriyya followers, "Xifu Taitai was from Guangwu, and was an exceptionally beautiful woman. After our mullah [Ma Hualong, the Thirteenth Papa] broke into the city of Guangwu, the *manzi* ["savages," here a pejorative designation of the Han] either died or escaped by the skin of teeth. It was a mess. While Tanye ["Tan Papa," a *reyisi* of the Thirteenth Papa] was walking down the street, purely by accident he bumped into this beautiful woman. The Thirteenth Papa eventually married this woman, and she acquired the name Xifu Taitai in Jahriyya."
>
> Later on, when over three hundred family members of the Thirteenth Papa were massacred by the Qing troops, only Xifu Taitai survived – because everyone knew that she was a Han. This was seen by Jahriyya followers as an amazing miracle enacted by the Thirteenth Papa: "He once said to Xifu Taitai, 'take all the sacred *yizhazi* with you. If you are captured, you just tell the captor that I forced you to marry me.' She did as told, and was later released by the Qing troops. She took with her eight chests, and four

[29] The book was written with the indispensable help of numerous Jahriyya students who travelled extensively in the 1980s across northwest China to collect for Zhang unpublished records and oral histories among the Jahriyya followers. Works in Arabic and Persian were meticulously translated for his use, and Zhang himself also occasionally travelled to collect stories. The book, in other words, is a product of collective work, although it might appear (due largely to the highly personal manner in which Zhang writes and presents the findings) to be essentially the work of a single author. It is prefaced and recommended by Ma Liesun, the "doorkeeper" of Jahriyya Maqiao *menhuan* from 1960 to 2012, which partially explains its popularity both among Jahriyya followers and beyond. Since its publication, two of its textual sources which previously were unknown to the outside world have been published in Chinese. See Guanliye, 1993; Ma, 1997. A revised version of Zhang's book was published in 2012. For a study of Zhang in the English language, see Henning, 2009.

> of them contained the *yizhazi* as proofs for authentic inheritance of Jahriyya teaching. The Thirteenth Papa had long before known that the Qing oppression would inevitably happen, and he married Xifu Taitai precisely to prepare for this ordeal."
>
> (Zhang, 1990, pp. 214-5)

Zhang does not deny that "all details about her life…are unverifiable," but he nonetheless proceeds to venture a generalization on all "women" taken as whole,

> Women, when they are born into a grand epoch, or especially when they submit themselves to great men of magnificent deeds in such an epoch, will necessarily lead a dazzling life. This can be seen throughout the Chinese history. But in the history of the Hui, one can see this only in Jahriyya…
>
> …Xifu Taitai is an unbelievable woman. She is more of a reflection of the glaring light that emanates essentially from the man who conquers her…She is a woman who obeys her hero, a real woman whose only pursuit is to share the fate of the hero whom she loves.
>
> (Ibid., pp. 216)

We don't know what happened after "Tanye…bumped into this beautiful woman." Some of the male Jahriyya disciples (a distinct and different female voice is emphatically missing in all the different narrations of this story) whom I interviewed recounted a story of how a stubbornly resisting Xifu Taitai was eventually moved by the sincerity of the Thirteenth Papa and overwhelmed by his skillful demonstration of wealth and power. "Xifu," or "the western residence," is precisely the name of the exquisite pavilion built exclusively for her by the Thirteenth Papa. Both her female gender and her Han identity are critical components of the story, and they are interlinked in forging the essentially masculinist imaginary of the Jahriyya genealogy: a Han woman as part of the loot snatched from the conquered Han men ("the savages") and who later, precisely because she is a Han woman, could secretly conserve the material objects upon which hangs the destiny of the continuity of the Dao of Jahriyya Sufism. "All details of her life…are

unverifiable," but she assumes, as an outsider (in terms of both religion/ethnicity and gender) who is never completely assimilated (this obscure position is the very condition of her structural significance in instituting the masculinist imaginary of modern Jahriyya), the crucial role of an indispensable hinge that sutures two different eras in the imaginary of the male Jahriyya followers. She is remembered only as "the reflection of the glaring light that emanates essentially from the man who conquered her." The moral geography and historical genealogy of contemporary Jahriyya Sufism are marked by this foundational sexual dissymmetry.[30] The peripheral position of the woman and the obscurity of their histories are matched only by the crucial structural role an ethnicized female gender plays in instituting the imaginary world in which Jahriyya followers situate both space and time. In this particular context, ethnicity is both inserted into and overdetermined by sexual difference and this overdetermination is an important feature of the modern Jahriyya *Lebenswelt*.

The abstraction of the patronym and its elevation above concrete genealogies can also be observed in a comparison between the two branches of Jahriyya, although its form is markedly different from what we have seen with respect to the nameless small *gongbei*s. The bifurcation of *daotong* ("genealogy of Dao") in Jahriyya happened after the demise of the Thirteenth Papa in 1871. The Banqiao *menhuan*, whose ritual of *Panchi Shanpan* I briefly discussed at the beginning of this chapter, claims that Ma Jinxi, one surviving grandson of the Thirteenth Papa to whom the sacred *yizhazi* has been passed precisely

[30] In a pamphlet circulated widely among the Jahriyya Banqiao *menhuan*, it is written that "the Thirteenth Papa *qu Xifu Taitai weiqi* ("took Xifi Taitai as his wife" – note how the marital relation is expressed) and used her 'special identity' (*teshu de shenfen*) to protect the *genmiao* in order to save the door of our religion (*jiaomen*)" (Banqiao Daotang, 2011, pp. 8). The literal rendition of *genmiao* is "root and sprout," with a strong masculinist undertone. The male semen of the religion is then saved by a woman with a "special (i.e. Han) identity."

through the hands of his grandmother Xifu Taitai, should be the genuine and sole inheritor qualified to bear the heavy responsibility of leading Jahriyya followers in their religious discipline and secular pursuit. Whereas the Maqiao *menhuan*, who initially accepted Ma Jincheng (the other and oldest grandson of the Thirteenth Papa who was castrated by the Qing imperial government at the age of 12 and sent to serve as a slave in an elite Manchu family in Kaifeng, Henan Province) as the inheritor, transferred their allegiance after the death of Jincheng to Ma Yuanzhang ("the Shagou Papa"), an heir of Daozu Papa based in Yunnan Province and whose extraordinary leadership contributed much to sustaining the social organization and economic maintenance of Jahriyya Sufism after the devastating execution of the Thirteenth Papa in late 19th century.

But the difference between Banqiao and Maqiao goes beyond this local bifurcation of *daotong*. The institution of *murshid* is defined at its foundation by a prognostic time limit materialized in the pre-determined number of generations sainthood can be effectively inherited. It is theoretically impossible, if this principle is faithfully heeded, for a *menhuan* to have an indefinite number of *murshid*s, and sooner or later, sainthood must be sealed and the door closed. All subsequent inheritors can no longer be seen to possess any saintly character, and their title, quite literally, is merely *shoumenren* ("the doorkeeper"). The indefinite period between the closure of sainthood and the Last Judgment is for the followers of *menhuan* a time of preparation. A millenarian vision – stronger for some, weaker for others – saturates this indeterminate duration of time: the End is drawing near as the last *murshid* has met his Lord. In a certain sense, the seal of sainthood is directly comparable to the end of prophethood after Muhammad that

constitutes one essential component of the Islamic faith and a major point of dispute between "the orthodox" view and the Indian Ahmadiyya movement in late 19th century.

Because of the bifurcation in *daotong* after the death of the Thirteenth Papa, and especially due to the fact that Ma Jinxi and Ma Yuanzhang co-existed for a considerable period of time as the dual head of the Jahriyya order in early 20th century, Banqiao and Maqiao have since diverged in their counting of the saintly generations. Setting the Thirteenth Papa Ma Hualong as the point of departure, the following figure shall suffice in showing the particular significance of this divergence for contemporary Jahriyya:

Banqiao	Maqiao
5th *murshid*, Ma Hualong (1810-1871)	5th *murshid*, Ma Hualong
6th *murshid*, Ma Jinxi (1866-1940)	6th *murshid*, Ma Jincheng (1865-1889)
7th *murshid*, Ma Teng'ai (1921-1991)	7th *murshid*, Ma Yuanzhang (1853-1920)
8th *murshid*, Ma Guoquan (1942-)	8th *murshid*, Ma Zhenwu (1895-1960)

Eight generations is the pre-determined number accepted among the Jahriyya followers as the inviolable limit initially imposed by Daozu Papa at the outset when he began to spread his teaching after his long study in Yemen. But how these eight generations are to be distributed across the indefinite time period before the seal of sainthood leaves much space for maneuvering among his disciples in later ages. As can be observed in the above figure, the short life of Ma Jincheng and the subsequent co-existence of Ma Jinxi and Ma Yuanzhang have entailed a profound divergence between Banqiao and Maqiao that has bred and continues to breed theological disputes: the last *murshid* of Maqiao, Ma Zhenwu,

died at a time when Ma Teng'ai, the 7th *murshid* of Banqiao, was still in good condition, and for over fifty years ever since, Banqiao has been enjoying a remarkable continuity in its *daotong* enabled by the continual existence of its *murshid*s, whereas Maqiao could only hold on to its successive "doorkeepers" (two up till now) who have in principle lost their saintly power and whose sole obligation is to sustain what has been left behind without contributing any considerable addition that might be suspected to lead the followers astray.

This dissymmetry is not without concrete consequences. Xiaohe, a Banqiao Jahriyya Hui whose small shop selling incense bowls, white caps, and Sufi classics was located at the entrance to the Banqiao *daotang*, took pains to explain to me how during regular rituals such as the weekly *Panchi Shanpan*, disciples of Banqiao would position the incense bowls in a particular way in order to deliberately demonstrate that "the true Dao is still with us," in contradistinction to its loss among the Maqiao Jahriyya,

> We have three bowls placed on the table around which the *dayi'er* sits: one big bowl at the center, and two smaller ones on each side. These bowls are three-legged, and we always face one of their legs inward towards our *reyisi*. This shows that it is us, not Maqiao, who still possesses the true Dao. As a matter of fact, it is only us who can still perform rituals such as *Panchi Shanpan*, because we still have our *murshid*, while they don't. Without the power and permission of the *murshid*, no one can do *Panchi Shanpan*.

Xiaohe was not the only one who tried to convince me of the authenticity of Maqiao by recourse to ritual minutiae whose interpretations, however, are not always the same for different Banqiao followers – and the incense bowls, as I later observed when I participated in these rituals, are not always positioned in such a way as to accord to Xiaohe's explanation. Yiming, a close disciple of Ma Guoquan ("Papa of Present Times,"

the current *murshid* of Banqiao *menhuan*), was another Jahriyya Hui who could keep on talking for hours about ritual niceties which he thought was the essence of Sufi practice, although, similar to what I have observed with Xiaohe, he often exaggerated the exactingness of these details and was deliberate in forming discourses on ritual steps which are not necessarily meticulously stipulated. In one such scenario, Yiming insisted that I picture every act of an Imam Ma while he was setting the table for a collective ritual at Banqiao *daotang*. "Stop there. Don't move." He said to Imam Ma. "Now take a picture!" He then turned to me. Imam Ma did not follow his instructions and continued silently with his work. Perhaps wary of Yiming's frequent interruptions after a few minutes, he suggested that I take a picture when everything had been ready and the table well set. "No, it is precisely how you do it that needs to be recorded. He needs to know every single step." Yiming told him, and then turned to me again, "every act of his has to follow the rule, and no step is arbitrary. Not everyone can do this. Imam Ma has been doing this for years and he is a veteran." Imam Ma did not speak up, leaving Yiming's voice echoing in the magnificent *daotang* draped in tapestries in praise of the Banqiao *murshid*s.

For Yiming, to be able to remember these details and to strictly follow their instructions in the performance or even the preparation for the performance of ritual is of paramount importance. The word *ermaili*, widely used among the Hui in northwest China to designate rituals performed at specific occasions (such as commemorating the dead) led by Hui clerics (not necessarily a Sufi *murshid* or a *reyisi*), is a direct transliteration of the Arabic word *'amal*, whose literal meaning is "to do." For Sufi Hui across different *menhuan*s, a ritual is first and foremost something that is "done," practiced with bodily

movements and vocal recitations. The very materiality of the acts (the voice of *dhikr*, the movement of the head following the rhythm of the recitation, kneeling down while keeping one's torso upright, sitting on one's legs and closing one's feet at the back, etc.) is an integral component of these *ermaili*, and "to do" is simultaneously to train oneself into the habitus of a Sufi. Even while driving, Yiming would chant "Allahamdu lilliahi" while raising one of his hands as if dropping a stone in the wooden box in order to demonstrate to me how the repetitive practice of *Panchi Shanpan* for the past thirty years had inscribed in his bodily disposition a habitus that hardly needs conscious manipulation: "You watched it so many times, and you heard the vocal recitations almost from the day you began to have memory. You don't need to memorize – it just comes to you. You learn it simply because it's been with you since time immemorial and it is melted in your blood."

Both Xiaohe and Yiming emphasized the importance of accurate ritual practice as proof of the authenticity of Banqiao. But their remarks are not on any ritual – their emphasis is on a particular kind of ritual typified by *Panchi Shanpan* that could be performed only with the power – either direct or delegated – of a *murshid*. It is not entirely a question of how demanding proceduralism and the exertion of laborious effort in ritual performance justify one's religious superiority. The performance of *Panchi Shanpan* refers directly to the presence of *murshid* himself, even though this presence is often mediated by his sanctioned local representative standing in for him only partially and temporarily. The ritual is null and does not produce any effect – in fact, it might even invite divine punishment for infelicitous usurpation when it is not led by a *murshid* or his recognized agent.

Those who are in the "door" of Maqiao *menhuan* do not deny that the absence of a *murshid* has essentially disqualified them from continuing to practice certain key rituals (not all of them) that give to Jahriyya a distinct identity. But to them, it is precisely this lack that constitutes a mark that paradoxically proves their authenticity in contrast to Banqiao. Xiaoyi, a young Jahriyya in his 30s with a college education in Beijing and born into a prominent Maqiao family with close affinal ties with the two consecutive "doorkeepers," did not hide his ridicule of Ma Guoquan in our conversation: "People now call him Ma Guo'qian' ("money"). If someone wants him to preside over a familial ritual, several thousand RMB is the minimum price. It could reach as high as tens of thousands." Refusing to accept him as a *murshid*, Xiaoyi insisted that it was only when one did not try to artificially extend the line of *murshid* for one's own benefit (for him as for other Maqiao followers, the 8th generation had already ended, and Ma Guoquan's status was merely brought about by arbitrarily accepting some *murshid*s in the genealogy while rejecting others, so as to land him squarely in the position of the 8th *murshid*) and willfully accept the absolute termination of sainthood that one is a true Jahriyya. For him, it is not filling the void left behind by the *murshid* as much as actively preventing its re-occupation that constitutes the touchstone that can test the authenticity of one's faith.[31] Sainthood is not and cannot be subject to human intervention, and perhaps unsurprisingly, this Jahriyya dictum acquires its concrete force in interpellating subjects precisely when the prognosticated time limit is rigidly obeyed. For Maqiao, the lack of a named and

[31] As a matter of fact, neither can Maqiao be completely exempt from the critique Xiaoyi is here waging against Banqiao. Ma Tong, a leading expert on Sufism in northwest China, has argued, for instance, that even Ma Zhenwu, the last *murshid* of Maqiao, should not have been the last and the Jahriyya sainthood should have sealed after Ma Yuanzhang (Shagou Papa) (Ma, 2000b, pp. 319-20). However, he gives no reason for this and merely says that "those who knew" said so.

visible *murshid* and his replacement by a "doorkeeper" does not reduce the power of *murshid*-hood as much as transforms and sublimates it.

Quoting Daba ("the big father") who was the oldest son of the last "doorkeeper" Ma Liesun, Xiaoyi extended this view of sainthood to the question of the miraculous power many Sufi followers consider to be possessed by *murshid*s: "Daba said all miracles are the work of Allah, and *murshid*s are merely the mediation, the agents through whom Allah intervenes in this world. They are the hands of Allah, not *vice versa*. If a *murshid* can unfailingly conjure miracles of his own will, then what's the difference between Islam and magic? And who is the servant, who the Lord? Are you making Allah serve you? Daba said whenever you see someone amassing a big following by demonstrating his ability in producing miracles, then you know that he is definitely a fake." After a short pause, he continued, "Jahriyya does not want a big following. In fact, Daba said we are now cutting people out instead of inviting people in. Faith is not easy, and people can seek comfort elsewhere. "

Obviously, not all Maqiao Jahriyya Hui could or are willing to inhabit the world instituted by the aporetic logic that sublimates the absence of a named saint into the general rule of anonymous sainthood itself. And the suspicious attitude to miracles – the latter being the very condition for "worshipping" the *murshid* to many ordinary rural Jahriyya followers – might indeed have pushed some away: the critique of miraculous power could be read against its advocate and the suspicion could be seen as an excuse for one's inability to perform any miracle due to the loss of sainthood. "Daba does not want to debate," Xiaoyi told me after I put to him the above thought which I heard among the Banqiao followers,

> If you engage them in a debate, you have already lost. You cannot beat them, and you will necessarily be tripped up by their logic. Daba refuses to speak to them. Jahriyya does not speak. We are cutting people out. "You can follow whomever you want," Daba often says, "My followers will not leave me, and those who leave me are not my followers."

In contrast to the proliferation among some Banqiao followers of discourses that emphasize ritual minutiae as a way to demonstrate the authenticity and continuity of their Dao, both Xiaoyi and Daba assume a position that resists speaking. This insistence on silence is not seen as an evasive compromise as much as required precisely by the internal logic of faith itself. The possibility of miracle is not ruled out as much as re-located in a space marked by a radical unpredictability that in fact restores to God and to the *murshid* as the "secret friend" and faithful servant of God a form of sacredness lost in "magical" manipulations. We should take note of a critical logic of recognition at work in this sublimation of sainthood: according to Daba, a *murshid* does not and never should (or *could*) demonstrate his sainthood by performing fantastic miracles. A *murshid is* a *murshid*, and one either believes or does not believe: "My followers will not leave me, and those who leave me are not my followers." He stands out as a test – those who follow him only for who he is or what he stands for instead of what he actually does or can do are not granting their recognition to a concrete person with essentially charismatic power (as it might not surprise anyone, most *murshid*s – but not all "doorkeepers" – do have charisma accrued to them). To accept unconditionally a certain figure as the *murshid* simply because he *is* the *murshid* and to treat seriously this apparent tautology as an essential component of the Sufi mystic teaching is precisely to realize the ultimate rule of an abstract sainthood.

A story which was recounted to me for multiple times by Sufi followers, both of Jahriyya and other *menhuan*s, condenses this lesson into a beautiful parable: it was said that once there was a Sufi who, in his enraptured state after long meditation in a cave, hastened through the busy market, holding a burning torch in one hand and a bucket of water in another. When stopped and questioned by the bewildered onlookers on why he held these two objects in his hands, he replied, "Both Heaven and Hell are fantasies. I use the torch to burn down the Heaven and the water to put out the fire in Hell." Perhaps bordering upon apostasy in the eyes of those for whom both Heaven and Hell are actual existences created and maintained by the infallible God as indispensible places for distributing rewards and punishments in the hereafter, the Sufi in the parable drives a hole in the world precisely with his unconditional faith – his gaze is fixed exclusively on God which remains and must remain essentially inaccessible. Both Heaven and Hell, one as the place where the faithful will be awarded while the other as the site where the disobeying will receive their due punishment, make God accessible and God's will at least partially predictable. To this legendary Sufi whose story is still being narrated and pondered and its "secret meaning" still pursued with passion, true faith is ultimately impossible without denying the faithful any access to the knowledge of salvation, and he will not be saved until he has completely extricated himself from the language of redemption. He does not speak – he even refuses to speak. The Sufi in the story does not explain to others why he wants to burn down the Heaven and quells the fire in Hell. He simply says he is going to. Perhaps to him as much as to Daba, his followers will not leave him, and those who accuse him of apostasy or heterodoxy are merely not his followers.

Materiality of Faith

The gendered genealogy of sainthood is not merely printed on paper and narrated in oral recollections. It is, more specifically, bodied forth by the concrete existence of *gongbei*s and *daotang*s. The memory of a Sufi is anchored in these significant sites and externalized by their consistent endurance of the wear and tear of time. To maintain the work of memory is simultaneously to attend to their demands for regular repair and at times complete reconstruction after devastating geological catastrophe (such as an earthquake). The upkeep of these highly important sites is sustained primarily by the voluntary donations contributed by *menhuan* followers. In order to understand how these donations are collected and distributed and to have an idea of the specific constitution of these donations (not all of which are in monetary forms), we need to briefly discuss the historical and contemporary organizations of *menhuan* economy. The shifts in this economy directly influence the frequency and quality of the repair work and put much pressure on the concrete organizational form of a *menhuan*.

Before the 1950s, most *menhuan*s possessed its land and the amount varied according to the size and influence of the respective *menhuan*. These lands were often purchased by the close entourage of the *murshid* who thus transformed the tribute of the followers into landed property seen to be owned only by the *murshid* as the embodiment of the *menhuan* as a whole. The *murshid*, though in principle wielding the highest authority – both religious and secular – in a *menhuan*, did not manage these properties on his own but was helped by a team of councilors who were also his closest disciples. These lands were rented out in most cases to followers of one's own *menhuan* and the tenants paid the rent on an annual basis as a separate payment completely distinguished from both their

voluntary donation (*sadaqah*) and alms-tax (*zakat*), with the *menhuan* again being the sole receiver of both. Even those who were not in a relationship of tenancy with their *menhuan* often had to contribute their labor service in the variety of daily family chores if they happened to live (as many did and preferred to) close to the residence of the *murshid*. These jobs, perhaps unsurprisingly, were almost exclusively distributed to female followers. Xiaoyi's mother, for instance, used to provide regular laundry service for the family of Ma Liesun ("the Second Papa of Yinchuan," the first "doorkeeper" of Jahriyya Maqiao after the passing of its last *murshid* Ma Zhenwu) and she worked under the directorship of a certain "Laundry Nana" (*Xiyi Nainai*) until the state-imposed communist collectivization set in in late 1950s that completely transformed the mode of production and form of organization that Jahriyya Maqiao had maintained since late imperial days. According to a record, after the execution of the Thirteenth Papa in 1871, the Qing troops confiscated over 190,000 tales of silver, but shortly afterwards during the reign of Shagou Papa, Maqiao regained its economic power in a remarkable pace: by early 20th century, it possessed over 160,000 *mu* (≈26,358 acres) of fertile land, a pasture of over 100,000 *mu* (≈16,474 acres), about 10,000 *mu* (≈1647 acres) of forest, 1200 cattle, over 12,000 goats and about 600 horses, mules and camels. The number of its total tenants reached as many as 300 at a time and the annual rent in kind as high as 300,000 *jin* (150,000 kilograms) of wheat (Ma, 2000b, pp. 328; 1991, pp. 104). Maqiao also engaged in trans-local business activities, and the wide distribution of Jahriyya followers only conduced to the expansion of its vast business network. Not only were camels used for transportation, they were increasingly displaced by modern vehicles such as trucks. Shagou Papa was able to command an immense business empire whose outposts reached as far as Shanghai,

Tianjin, Lanzhou, and Baotou, amassing a huge amount of wealth as the firm economic basis for maintaining the existence of Jahriyya Maqiao *menhuan*.

This well-organized and self-sustaining economic system was dismantled almost overnight in late 1950s by the communist state that professed to carry the message of land reform to the peasant followers of *menhuan*. The economic power of Maqiao never recovered, and the small amount of land it now possesses (at most several hundred *mu*, and much of this land is not as fertile as what it used to own) is only leased to three or four Jahriyya households who recently moved from the mountainous area to the northern Ningxia plain where the central *daotang* of Maqiao is located. With the loss of a stable source of income previously offered by the business enterprise it controlled, the "doorkeepers" of Maqiao could only depend upon the *haidiye* (*hadīa*, "gift") contributed by its followers on a purely voluntary basis. Compared to its past affluence, Maqiao *menhuan* is now much less able to subject its followers to its almost all-encompassing governance buttressed by its unification of religious and socio-economic power. The upkeep of *gongbei*s and *daotang*s has not completely lost its regularity, but the current "doorkeeper" of Maqiao (Ma Jie, or "Sanba," the third son of Ma Liesun) has to plan ahead and use the tributes wisely and thriftily so as not to overpay his balance. The dissolution of an organic economic relationship that more concretely binds the followers to the *menhuan* only reinforces the importance of the religious connection in continuing to maintain its organizational solidary, and perhaps unprecedentedly, the *menhuan* itself begins to depend almost exclusively upon the *ad hoc* voluntary donations of its followers in sustaining its own existence.

I have already noted that not all contemporary *haidiye* contributed by *menhuan* followers are in monetary terms. Many in fact choose to make their contribution in kind. Instead of cash, they often donate large quantities of oil and flour (to a lesser degree meat, fresh vegetables and dairy products) to the *menhuan* mosques and *daotang*s, which, save the amount they consume, would often transport these donations to the central *daotang* where there might be a larger demand. That oil and flour are the two most popular items for *haidiye* has directly to do with their functions associated with ritual performances. Almost every ritual – either those grand commemoration rituals involving a large number of *menhuan* followers or annual familial rituals commemorating deceased relatives – is followed by a communal meal. *Youxiang*, a kind of fried pancake used invariably as the staple food eaten with mutton or beef stock on ritual occasions, is an indispensable component of the Hui cuisine and the two major ingredients of it are precisely oil and flour. Although the use of *youxiang* for communal meal is not confined to Sufi *menhuan* and has become – at least to my ethnographic knowledge – a culinary marker of Hui Islamic ritual in general, it is framed in different terms according to different Hui Islamic traditions. One major character that distinguishes the making of *youxiang* in *menhuan* is the latter's much stricter stipulations as to what specific ritual steps one needs to follow in order to make *youxiang*s that could meet the religiously mediated demands of the communal meal. In addition to cleansing oneself completely before touching the utensils and the ingredients (*ghusl*, or the "full ablution," in contrast to *wuḍū*, the "partial ablution," performed before every of the five daily prayers), every subsequent step is framed by recitations of particular Quranic verses (or, as is more often the case, sections of them) and other commonly used expressions in the praise of Allah and the Prophet.

Different *menhuan* may choose different verses or sections of them and may also break up extant verses and re-mix them in particular ways. Some might even choose to use non-Quranic verses extracted from their own textual sources or pre-designated by their own *murshid*s for the specific purpose of making *youxiang*. These recitations elevate the *youxiang*s thus made above the mundane world of daily consumption and render them into "clean" food qualified to fulfill the function of being consumed after a ritual performance.

I will say more on *youxiang* in a moment. But it is its inscription in the economic system of contemporary *menhuan* that I now focus upon. The specific material nature of the *haidiye* in kind determines that the food items contributed could be used largely (not exclusively, since they can also be objects for daily consumption) only for communal consumption after collective rituals, and seldom do the central *daotang*s where these rituals often take place exchange the donated food for cash on the market. More often than not, these food items, though usually of an enormous amount especially before significant dates, could hardly meet the huge demand for communal consumption, since most collective rituals at central *daotang*s could draw in an immense number of followers that could be anywhere from several to tens or even hundreds of thousands. This further limits the amount of cash that could be put to use by the *menhuan murshids* and doorkeepers. This certainly does not mean that most *menhuan*s are currently on the verge of bankruptcy – which is far from the case, and it is in fact not uncommon for Jahriyya Maqiao, for instance, to have an annual cash income of one or two million exclusively as a result of the *haidiye* contribution from its followers. What I do want to emphasize at this point, however, is that the disintegration of the old economic mode by which

*menhuan*s had sustained their existence for centuries up until late 1950s has rendered them more dependent upon the voluntary donations of their followers and made their economic maintenance more uncertain and vulnerable to the general socio-economic changes that may cause difficulties to their predominantly rural followers (the prevalence of *haidiye* in kind must also be situated squarely in this rural context – though Ningxia and northwest China in general are not exempt from the state-imposed rapid urbanization since 1990s). The regular upkeep of the material markers of the saintly genealogy is subject to this regime of economic uncertainty and financial fluctuation.

But *gongbei*s and *daotang*s are not the only material objects that substantiate the gendered genealogy of a Sufi *menhuan*. Perishable foods, when framed in ritual terms and located within a ritual or ritually mediated space, could also – certainly to a lesser degree due precisely to their perishable character – fulfill the function of instituting the formation of a Sufi lifeworld. *Youxiang*, the indispensible component of any Hui cuisine that accompanies a Hui Islamic ritual performance, is particularly significant in this respect. In one familial ritual which I participated in Tianjin that commemorated a recently deceased relative, the hot air bump on the dough as it was inflated when fried in the boiling oil was interpreted as a sign of the happiness of the dead. “See how she smiles!” I was told by the woman who was turning the dough upside down to even out the heat. The aura of *youxiang* increases as one moves away from the confined context of a family to the larger world of collective rituals that can be performed only in central *daotang*s of a *menhuan*. After each *Panchi Shanpan* held every Wednesday night at Banqiao *daotang* in Wuzhong, not only are *youxiang*s consumed on the spot with *fentang* (a kind of mutton broth made from the goats slain particularly for the weekly ritual

[which is why Banqiao *daotang*, like most other *daotang*s, still keeps a flock large enough to accommodate this regular ritual need], with potatoes, tomatoes, carrots, and firm soy jellies put in to add to its texture), they are also distributed among the participants in packs that also contain chunks of boiled mutton seasoned with peppercorn and anise star. This sharing beyond the ritual context confined within the actual environ of the *daotang* is an internal part of the communal sociality conjured by the collective rituals. It is often described as an act of *zhanji*, or "sharing the auspiciousness," implying that those who have not participated in the actual ritual but who have consumed these *youxiang*s and mutton in part consecrated by the ritual performances for which they are prepared according to established procedures will also have accrued to them the exceptional mercy and blessing of God resulting from the correct performance of the ritual. One has to consume these foods before they spoil and with a pious heart. Even those "lapsed Muslims" who might not obey the Islamic restriction on the consumption of alcohol in their daily life would not risk eating these *youxiang*s and mutton with liquor.

There is an additional use of *youxiang* which perhaps shows in the most convincing way the partially sacred character (not for all, and to different extent for those Hui who accept its sacredness) of this apparently mundane food made with the simple ingredients of oil and flour. Many rural *menhuan* followers would dehydrate the *youxiang*s given them after major commemoration rituals at the central *daotang* and grind them into fine powder with a small family mill used for food preparation. When sickness hits someone in the family, some of these powders will be sprinkled in a glass of water to make the latter into an elixir thought to possess an extraordinary healing power. The "auspiciousness" of the ritual is seen to be preserved by the granular particles into which

the *youxiang*s have been physically dissolved, and the abstract saintly genealogy now functions precisely through the minutest grain of flour. To a certain extent, what one previously contributed to the *daotang* (the *haidiye* in kind) is transformed and consecrated by the collective ritual practice and then returned to oneself with this extra magical power that saturates every single particle of the ground *youxiang*s. It is as if one could not fully absorb the "auspiciousness" unless the *youxiang*s are fully broken down into the smallest pieces possible whose charm could then be magnified by being liquefied in water.

Youxiang, though perhaps one of the most significant food items with ritual significance in Hui Islam, is nonetheless not the only substance whose powdered form is given such magical value. Ashes from incenses burnt in major rituals are also seen to be able to fulfill a similar function. Yiming, the young Jahriyya imam who were eager to prove to me the authenticity of Banqian's *daotong* by demonstrating to me its insistence on ritual minutiae, also had a particular liking for these ashes. During my first visit to Banqiao *daotang*, Yiming insisted that all the incense bowls he showed me that were placed on the table around which the *dayi'er* sat were precious historical relics (*guwu*) that bodied forth the long continuity of Banqiao Jahriyya, although, as it soon became clear to me and somehow to his embarrassment, some of them were manufactured merely a decade ago in local workshops. "But all the rest are old stuff," he winked and put down the one on whose bottom was the mark of its recent fabrication. There were three bowls placed on the long table around which the *dayi'er* would sit. The big one in the middle was flanked by a smaller one on each side. These bowls play different roles in the course of ritual performance: a thick incense would be planted in the major one in the middle,

signifying, according to Yiming "either Allah or the Prophet, or perhaps the *murshid*" and the two thin incenses planted in each of the two minor bowls signifies "either the four angels of Islam or the four Caliphs who assisted the Prophet, or perhaps the *reyisi*s appointed by the *murshid*." Yiming was not sure of the exact meaning of these incenses and neither did he think that it was important to have a fixed meaning – "you can read whatever you like into it." Compared to his insistence upon ritual details, his interpretations of them were surprisingly lacking in coherency and this insufficiency did not seem to bother him as much as it did me, who was trying, largely in vain, to press him and his colleagues (e.g. Laoma at the beginning of this chapter, who was a close friend of Yiming) to give me coherent explanations on every ritual practice they were engaged in.

The fetish of historical continuity moved quickly from the bowls to the ashes contained in them. The major bowl, made from pure copper "darkened because of years of use," was filled with fine grit of incense ash stacked up into a white heap evened out at its top to prevent an avalanche as more ash would fall from the thick incense to be burnt in future rituals. A small box that contained bits of chopped wood was placed right next to the bowl. "When the incense burns down to its bottom [i.e. when the ritual reaches a particular stage], we will bury it in the ashes. We call this *fenghuo* ("sealing the fire"). To keep it burning, we will insert some of these wood pieces into the mound, and the fire would burn calmly, hidden under the ashes." After a short pause as if pondering the meaning of this "sealing," Yiming proceeded, again to offer an explanation which he did not claim to be authoritative: "Perhaps this is an indication that Jahriyya does not attempt to reveal the truth to broad daylight. Perhaps truth exists only in secret. During our weekly rituals, we also shut the drapes at particular moments – maybe that follows the

same logic. Think about that." But as always, Yiming did not dwell for too long on interpretation. He rather moved on to tell me how he once *yaxianghui* ("pressed the ash") for the "exquisite bowl" that belonged to Ma Guoquan ("Papa of Present Times," the current *murshid* of Banqiao Jahriyya) after a familial ritual conducted in the latter's home. "Not everyone could do this," Yiming did not hide his pride,

> The ashes are from years of accumulation, from countless *ermaili*. You have to be very careful, especially with your breath. It is also a form of training that one has to go through, and it is obviously a rare chance that you can be allowed to *yaxianghui* for a *murshid*. I still remember that I made it into a beautiful heap – not a single grit dropped from the pile. Quan Papa was glad. In fact, many Jahriyya followers would sprinkle incense ashes in water, and drink the water to heal their sickness. I haven't tried it, but I know people who do that. They say it's effective.

Yiming did not deny the efficacy of the ashes, but neither, it seems, did he completely believe in it. But these ashes nonetheless matter to him as a Jahriyya disciple in at least two ways: on the one hand, *yaxianghui* is seen as an intrinsic component of the training a Sufi has to go through. The specific material condition of the ashes makes this task particularly demanding, and one has to remain calm and stable, controlling both the minute movement of one's hands and the rhythm and strength of one's breath. Patience in this case is not merely a spiritual virtue learned through meditation, but a bodily disposition that can only be produced through performing subtle tasks such as *yaxianghui*. The "beauty" of the heap is a material expression of the "beauty" of Yiming's own Dao. On the other, the ashes, precisely because their quantity has reached such a level as to

require “pressing,” is turned into a metonym of the continuity of ritual performances which themselves are the material substantiations of the defining saintly genealogy that marks a *menhuan*. The accumulated remains are not made to refer to an external historical process of continuous ritual performance as much as they are seen as having to the contrary enfolded that very history into its most concrete material existence and compressed it into every single granule of its sabulous body. It’s not the ashes as much as history itself that one drinks. It is the saintly genealogy and its continuous substantiation that possesses the healing power desired by the Jahriyya followers. The fetish of the ashes in this case *is* the fetish of history.

The articulation of materiality and history in a Sufi *menhuan* can at times entail surprising epiphanies for those who have not completely grasped its literality. Luojie, who was from a Qadiriyya family in the rural county of Tongxin in Ningxia (it is important to note at this point that I know few cases of individual conversions to Sufi *menhuan* – it is always a question of familial affiliation and kinship connections), spent much of her adult life away from home. Obtaining her undergraduate, master’s and eventually doctoral degrees in history from Beijing Normal University, she returned to Yinchuan, the provincial capital of Ningxia, to take up a job in Ningxia University of Medicine. She was much interested in the tradition of “Hui medicine” which, according to her, was a complex mixture of Arabian, Persian and Chinese medicine. Highly suspicious of the healing efficacy of incense ashes, she nonetheless proceeded to tell me an impressive experience of hers that pertained to the fetish of a different kind of powdered substance among her own order, namely, the dirt from the sacred *gongbei*s –

> When I was small, whenever I got sick, my family would take some dirt, sprinkle them in water and let me drink it. They told me the dirt was from the *gongbei* of my great grandfather. Over the years, I took this for granted, but always thought that the dirt might come from a particular designated site in the *gongbei* – for instance, from upon the surface of his tombstone. Or, I even thought that this might be merely a metaphor, and the dirt I drank was not actual dirt, but perhaps something else altogether which has been called "dirt." The powder might be from the plants that have grown in the vicinity of the *gongbei*, or it might have been made from other edible substances that may be related to the *gongbei* or to my great grandfather. I thought there should have been some ritual procedures involved in making these powders. But no! One day when I was walking with my paternal uncle (*bofu*) past the *gongbei*, he told me to wait for him for a minute and he needed to "take some dirt." I saw with my own eyes that he scraped some dirt just from the wall of the *gongbei* – I mean, literally, really, just dirt! I asked him, "Really? This is what I have been drinking since I was a kid? Just dirt, scraped off the wall?" "Of course. What did you think it was?" he replied as if I should have known all along.

Luojie's surprise comes from the apparent lack of ritual framing by means of which the "actual dirt" can metamorphosize into "magical substance" that can heal diseases. No specific procedures were followed on the spot and no spatial distinctions were made as to where the dirt should be extracted. She had thought that the "dirt" might still bear a character of edibility and might still thus qualify as a kind of "medicine" not fundamentally different from the herbs and spices often used in the Chinese medicinal world. Both the anticipation of ritual procedure and the assumption of edibility are efforts to frame the "dirt" in a way that could render it acceptable to the imaginary to which Luojie has been given, before that unexpected moment kicked in when she saw her uncle scraping dirt off the *gongbei*'s wall. For her, it is not the materiality of dirt as much as the sudden and unmediated manifestation of the literality in the articulation of materiality and sainthood that struck her in her face. The dirt, precisely because of its inedible material character and its supposed distance from the world of human consumption, does not merely "express" the sainthood of the interred Sufi master as much as imposes its

magical power upon the world in such a way as to induce amazement and epiphany. “Dirt” is just that, dirt – it is certainly already integrated into the Sufi world and has arguably already been transformed by being associated with the passed *murshid*. But this magical metamorphosis and its particular efficacy also presuppose that the specificity of its materiality is not reduced by this transformation: it is and must continue to remain “actual dirt” so that its magical efficacy can acquire its most fantastic power both in healing sickness and, perhaps more importantly, in producing precisely the kind of striking epiphany which gripped Luojie at that impressive moment.

But the materiality of other sacred objects associated with sainthood might not be as so clear as we have seen with the powdered substances, and neither does the magical power in re-invigorating life always manifest itself in the healing of human ailments. Cash notes of various values – from 10 RMB, 20 RMB, to 50 RMB and occasionally even 100 RMB – are often (not always) handed out to all the participants after every *menhuan* collective ritual, and the actual amount given varies according to the importance of the ritual performed. Each participant receives only one bill, and the money is often prepared in advance by the *daotang* where these rituals take place. Because of this large and regular demand for currency notes of the same value, most of the paper bills distributed to the ritual participants are brand new and withdrawn all at once from the local bank, some even bearing consecutive serial numbers.

It is not this commonplace act of *sadaqah* (“voluntary charity”) as much as the particular use to which this charitable money is usually put that I am interested in. Many rural *menhuan* followers would mix the money into the larger amount they have saved to purchase crop seeds – it is supposed that the money received after the collective ritual

could give to the entire amount a special magical power which, when put into an exchange relationship, can be transferred to the seeds purchased, and condense into the latter an extraordinary fertility which could then entail a good harvest at the end of the agricultural cycle. The efficacy of this exchange hinges upon two indispensable conditions: first, it must be presumed that the magical power of the ritual note, confined in the material existence of the bill, is nonetheless contagious, and that the whole "amount" can be transformed by this particular component. On the one hand, quantification appears to be a necessary step so that the contagiousness of the ritual money can be magnified. No particular rituals (such as rubbing) – at least to my knowledge – are performed in order to literally pass the power of the ritual bill to other notes. It is not physical contiguity as much as quantification that seems to fulfill the function of amplifying the contagiousness of the ritual note. This specific inflection of the logic of sympathetic magic is rendered possible precisely because the object involved is a "special" kind of object whose exchange value almost completely overruns its use-value. Quantification is not resisted as much as invited precisely to assist the realization of sympathetic magic. On the other, it is precisely because the paper money still possesses not so much a "use-value" as a concrete material bearing that it can be made to carry the magical power endowed upon it by the ritual performances. A 10 RMB note given by the *daotang* must be distinguished from any other notes of the same value, despite the fact that they appear exactly the same to the anonymous market. This individualization necessarily presupposes that the specific materiality of the ritual notes can become recognizable, and this recognition cannot be realized unless one attends exactingly to the material details of the ritual notes. But it is also true that the visibility and thematization

of this materiality would not obtain except when it is re-situated in a ritual space and transformed by the ritual performances. The material bearing has to be structured in a particular ritual space in order for it to be recognized as such – one does not see the actual note as distinct from its exchange value up until the moment when it is given the magical power by the collective rituals. This dialectic of materiality and ritual transformation is the first condition one has to presume in order to understand the magical value of the ritual notes.

The second condition requires us to pay more attention to the exchange relationship itself. The fertility of the ritual money does not manifest itself in the form of an increase in its exchange-value: a 50 RMB bill does not become a 100 RMB bill after ritual transformation. It is not, in other words, purely as *money* that ritual notes acquire their fertility. They cannot buy more seeds, as their exchange value remains unchanged after the ritual, and it is to the *use-value* of the seeds purchased that their magical power is accrued. The particular kind of exchange relationship that thus emerges therefore bears a dual and perhaps transitional character that could in part be seen to speak to the living condition of many rural *menhuan* followers still leading a primarily agricultural life: on the one hand, exchange has practically become an indispensable and crucial component of life, to the point where one even has to purchase seeds on the market without being able to produce them from one's own crops.[32] On the other, however, a certain physiocratic imaginary still persists among these followers according to which nature continues to be seen as the source where economic value originates. Although they well

[32] The seeds purchased have often been genetically modified and the crops that grow from them cannot produce fertile seeds. This agricultural technology has forced many Chinese peasants to buy their seeds from the market and has literally created the dependence of the peasants on market exchange.

know that their seeds cannot breed new seeds and have to be replaced by newly purchased seeds after their fertility is inevitably exhausted after the agricultural cycle, they nonetheless expect that the magical power thus transferred to them by the ritual notes can increase their limited fertility and eventually bring about a good harvest.

By venturing a conjecture on the possible relationship between the magical power of ritual notes and the economic condition of *menhuan* followers, I do not mean to imply that we can find a direct correspondence between the two. I merely want to gesture to the possible direction in investigating the articulation of two economic logics (the economy of Sufi magical power and the economy of agricultural life in transition) which I cannot explore in this chapter (nor in this dissertation). My primary focus here is still on the symbolic and organizational conditions that give to a *menhuan* its relative solidarity that centers upon its *murshid*. The dual character of exchange manifested in the use of ritual bills in fact points to a more general Sufi logic that could also be observed at a different site, namely, the site of language. In addition to performing the five daily prayers following the designated schedule, a committed Sufi disciple often has to engage in highly personalized obligations. One such obligation – and the easier one compared to *zuojing* ("meditation," often involving weeks or even months of seclusion devoted completely to praying and continuous remembrance of Allah, with a small amount of food and water) – is to recite *niantou* almost incessantly for one's entire life. *Niantou*s are short incantations that establish an exclusive connection between the *murshid* and his disciples on a purely individual basis. The specific content of a *niantou* could be a common expression used frequently in prayers or praises of Allah and the Prophet (e.g. Allahu Akbar, Allahamdu lilliahi, or even the *Shahadah*), or sections of a Quranic verses,

or any other words and sentences which the *murshid* prefers to pass on to his disciples. The critical point is that each disciple has taught him or her (female followers, noticeably, are not excluded – but they are confined to this highly personalized individual self-cultivation and continue to be assigned a marginal position [not completely excluded] in male-centered collective rituals) a particular *niantou* by the *murshid* that belongs to him or her exclusively. No one else, except the disciple and the *murshid* (or his *reyisi* – *niantou* could also be taught by the delegates of *murshid*, in the same way that rituals can be conducted by his local representatives), knows the content of the *niantou*, and it is strictly forbidden that disciples reveal their *niantou*s either among themselves or to the outside world. Verbal exchanges in this respect are invariably seen as gross violations that could seriously compromise the result of one's cultivation and render oneself suspicious as to the sincerity of one's intention.

The exclusivity of *niantou*, however, is not based upon its content. It is completely possible that two disciples who know each other fairly well share exactly the same *niantou*. The *murshid* might also distribute the same set of *niantou*s to different disciples so there are always people who recite the same *niantou*s. The individualization of *niantou* for each disciple is effected only by an imposed secrecy that strictly forbids communication. Although most disciples may know that his or her *niantou* is not unique in its content, it is nonetheless made unique by the exclusive line that binds him or her to the *murshid*. It is specifically *him* or *her* that recites, and the *niantou*, as an incantation shared with many others, is nonetheless subtracted from the world of language and rendered unique despite its content that can be appropriated by one's fellow disciples. The *murshid* or his delegate also dictates when one should recite the *niantou* (e.g. at what

time during the day, whether before or after certain prayers), how many times one should recite it at each specific time point, how fast one should progress, and when it might be the time to add more obligations. Each disciple has his or her own schedule which may or may not be the same as those of others'. There does not exist – and must not exist according to the principle of secrecy – an established procedure or a written manual that outlines a general training process which can be applied indifferently to everyone.

The prohibition against the publication of *niantou* is reinforced by another concern that cuts deep into the nature and function of it in the system of Sufi self-cultivation. Honglefu, the central *daotang* of Jahriyya Maqiao *menhuan*, located in the rural outskirts of the city of Qingtongxia in Ningxia, holds a training school of around 300 students. Many of these students have their home in Ningxia, while the rest come from as far as Gansu, Guizhou and Xinjiang Provinces. Both tuition and accommodation are free of charge – the funding comes exclusively from the donation of Maqiao followers (the annual expense of this school, as I was told, is around two million RMB). The program lasts three years (though some students, especially those who want to devote themselves to the clerical job, choose to stay beyond the third year) and teaches basic Arabic, Quranic recitation and interpretation, *Ḥadīth*, Islamic jurisprudence, and classics that belong exclusively to the Jahriyya order. "But we are not taught *niantou*," Marui, a student in his third-year with whom I shared the room on my visit, told me. "The old teachers here no long teach that." Another student from Guizhou picked up where Marui dropped off. He then continued,

> They used to teach that to students, but now they have stopped. There are so many temptations (*youhuo*) in this world, and many students prefer to do something else than to be a real Sufi. If the teachers continue to teach

> *niantou*, what if the students cannot persevere in their recitation according to the procedure laid down for them? To know the *niantou* without practicing the recitation is tantamount to sinning while knowing that one is committing sin. The teachers know we cannot do it, and we also know we are not ready for it. So they won't teach, and we don't want to learn. This is good for all of us: they won't commit sin for teaching *niantou* to those who could not recite, and we won't commit sin for learning what we cannot bear.

"In Jahriyya," another student in his fifth year kicked in, "knowing and practicing are one and the same thing (*zhixing heyi*). You don't really know until you can actually do it. If you cannot do it, then you knowledge is imperfect."

The actual act of recitation, therefore, is an intrinsic component of *niantou*. It both substantiates and individualizes *niantou* for the self-cultivation of a Sufi. A *niantou* remains in principle an anonymous text which is still appropriatable by anyone until the moment it is singularized by the silent recitation of a particular Sufi disciple, made unique by his or her own voice which could be heard only by him or herself. An un-singularized *niantou*, i.e. one that is not incessantly recited and not given a particular life by one's own irreplaceable voice, becomes at once the mark of one's sin – and this sinning is irrevocable, since one can never again extricate oneself from the snare of "imperfect knowledge." The subtraction of *niantou* from the general world of language in which open communication and anonymous appropriation reign supreme depends for its life essentially on the living voice of the reciting Sufi. The real test for a Sufi hinges precisely upon this tension between the anonymity of language and the singularity of *niantou*. This is the very burden passed to a Sufi disciple by his or her *murshid*.

Conclusion

Luojie was not always negative about her mother. In two stories which she gave me, her mother even figured as the wise protagonist. In the first one, her mother offered a convincing answer to a question which had befuddled her for a long time –

> The doorkeeper of our *menhuan* is a jerk. He spent liberally the money given him by the followers. I have myself seen with my own eyes how he spent 10,000 RMB in a department store just within one day. How could he do that? Many followers of our *menhuan* know this, but they still continue to pay tribute to him. I don't understand. So I asked my mom. She said that she gave him money not because who he was or what he had done. She was not giving money to *him*. She was showing her respect and veneration to the history which he represented *despite* himself. Whatever he did, that history remains unchanged. He was there to stand in for that history. Well, I think this makes sense.

In the second story, it was again her mother who knew before she did –

> Once when I was at home, a neighbor dropped by for a visit. He was not a *murshid*, just a common follower. But he could *zuojing* for 120 days – this means his Dao is already pretty strong. One of my sisters boiled some water to make him tea. But the moment he drank it, he began to vomit and could not stop it. Eventually, he had to leave. My mom immediately started to blame my sister – the moment she saw him vomiting, she suddenly realized that my sister was having a period. She knew it must be it. Isn't it uncanny? He just kept vomiting. He did not know my sister was bleeding, but he just could not stop vomiting! My mom knew it all along.

It is only when her mother is well integrated into the saintly genealogy and assumes a position in the masculinist world by speaking its gendered language that Luojie could give her a positive image, even when this language itself is predicated upon a marginalization of woman. Luojie did not tell me what her sister said, whether she accepted her mother's scolding, or if she also believed it was her period that caused the mysterious vomiting. The woman speaks, but it is nonetheless a male voice that speaks through her.

In this chapter, I have studied the institution of sainthood (*murshid*-hood) and secrecy, paying specific attention to its various manifestations and expressions in the world of Hui Sufi *menhuan*. This predominantly rural world is different from the world of urban mosques in at least three ways: first, instead of being confined with a localized mosque constrained by state administrative regulations and turned into a certain segregated local autonomy closing in upon itself, the influence of a *menhuan* radiates across immense geographical distance and integrates an enormous number of followers into an imaginary structured by its saintly genealogy which, more concretely, is materialized by the *gongbei*s and *daotang*s that dot its trans-local landscape. Second, in contrast to an urban mosque managed primarily by a state-recognized secular institution ("the commission for the democratic management of the mosque") which increasingly displaces both popular consensus and clerical power from their previously primal positions in the local mosque, both the religious and the secular authority of a Sufi *menhuan* still resides firmly in the hands of its *murshid* or doorkeeper, despite the fact that the incompetence – even corruption – of many of these leaders is not unbeknown to their followers. Their authority is only reinforced by the reserved recognition often granted them by the state in the form of largely nominal and honorary political posts in the local, provincial, or even national governments. Ma Guoquan, the current *murshid* of Jahriyya Banqiao *menhuan*, is a commissioner in the National CPPCC (Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference) and vice chair of the Ningxia CPPCC. Hong Yang (b. 1964), the extraordinary *murshid* of Hongmen *menhuan* which belongs to the general Khufiyya order, is also a vice chair of Ningxia CPPCC, in addition to other lower positions in Wuzhong and Tongxin. Both live in well-guarded luxurious residential buildings where

high government officials and wealthy merchants concentrate. Third, contrary to an urban mosque where the open competition for the control of communal property triggers the emergence of a social space marked by public exposure and anxiously pursued transparency, the binding power of a Sufi *menhuan* hinges upon an actively maintained blockage of both seeing and knowing. This blockage is realized by systematically transforming what knowing is and how knowing can be accomplished.

History is a critical component of a Sufi *menhuan*, either in the form of a substantive genealogy remembered and commemorated on an annual basis according to an established calendar, or in the form of an abstract and sublimated *consciousness* of history that does not necessarily concretize itself in any substantive memory. This history, as I have tried to show at various points in this chapter, is strongly masculinist, and the figure of the woman occasionally appears in this historical narrative merely to gesture to its exclusion. Even when some of these unnamed – and perhaps unnamable in this masculine imaginary – women are remembered (such as Xifu Taitai), they are remembered only through their "heroes" who are invariably male. Secrecy is not gender-neutral, and neither is its organizational power in instituting a Sufi lifeworld. It is underwritten by sexual difference, and every grain of its powdered *youxiang*, incense ashes, and *gongbei* dirt narrates the marginalization and exclusion of woman upon which the magical force of the mysterious and charismatic *murshid* is predicated.

Part I

CHAPTER 4

Servant of God: The Clerical World of Hui Islam

A somewhat strange ritual is performed in almost every Hui funerary rite I participated in during my fieldwork in Henan and Ningxia. Those who happen to be present for the Janāza prayer often participate in the performance of this ritual by standing in a circle, and a Quran wrapped in cloth will be given by an imam and passed around, accompanied on each step by silent recitations of short Quranic verses, or – which is less common – by a Persian saying which means "I have taken this from you, and now I give it away," recited also quietly by every participant who has laid hands on the Quran. This ritual, according to some imams I talked to, is a variation of another, in which it is not the Holy Quran as much as money that is passed around.

The general rationale of the rite, according to the view shared unanimously by all imams whom I interviewed, is to make monetary donations to the poor in the name of the deceased, in the hope that this charitable act performed in his or her stead can compensate for the prayers and fasts he or she missed in lifetime and by virtue of this compensation can earn him or her blessings from God in the Hereafter. This interpretation, however,

can hardly explain why the money, instead of being distributed directly to the poor, is passed around in a circle, recycled multiple times before being broken down for distribution (there's no fixed amount to be passed and distributed, and the sum each family is able and willing to contribute can vary widely, from tens of RMB to tens or even hundreds of thousands). Another explanation that goes further in this respect argues that because the number of the prayers and fasts many deceased Hui have missed in their lifetime is so immense that it is practically impossible – however rich his or her family might be – to make up with ordinary monetary contributions given directly to the needy. The money is passed around in order to "represent" (*daibiao*) that the contribution has reached a significant number of people and has been subject to circulation by means of which its effect is magnified and its return in the afterlife maximized. That the ritual could remain felicitous despite the fact that the money passed around the circle is not spent and does not materialize into any concrete assistance for the poor (and not all those who participate in the ritual qualify as "needy") depends upon the acceptance of a basic Islamic doctrine by all participants and onlookers: that the real source, true generator, and only possessor of all wealth is God, and all humans in this world are merely temporary watchers who "look after" the wealth and who therefore must pass on his or her riches to others because these riches don't fundamentally belong to him or her. The ritual is a literal (perhaps too literal) rendition of this doctrine, a faithful (perhaps too faithful) performance of it in a confined and contracted space of a mosque.

The literality of this ritual makes it an easy target for a variety of criticisms that all take issue with the tenability of the "passing on" of money as a way to increase the efficacy of the donation – whether, that is, the circulation of money on the spot, without

actually integrating the process of labor, exchange and consumption, can indeed be seen as a felicitous rendition of the Islamic doctrine on charity. But my interest is not in these dispersed disputes. The replacement of money by the Quran is an important inflection in the evolution of this ritual, and the reason I was often given for this somewhat surprising shift is in fact in line with its internal logic: that even the circulation of money cannot fulfill the function anticipated of it. There are simply too many prayers missed, too many fasts ignored, too much "work" (*gongke*) left undone, too much sin still awaiting repentance. Nothing can compensate for that – unless, as the very last means one could resort to, one replaces the money with the Quran, since "you cannot put a price on the Quran – it is a priceless treasure, a miracle from God," said Imam Mai of Down Mosque in Zhengzhou. The immense gap that separates one from one's atonement, the incommensurability between what one has done (or perhaps what one could ever do) and what is required to be done for the attainment of salvation, prompts the use of the Quran, itself seen as a "priceless treasure" that can never be commensurably exchanged with any other worldly objects, the general equivalent included. The entry of the Holy Quran upon the scene is somewhat a desperate gesture, the culmination of an anxiety of not being able to bring to the dead the atonement so eagerly desired by his or her living family.

Nonetheless, all these still could not prevent those imams involved in this ritual from being criticized for "selling out" the Quran, as "trading" the Islamic religion in exchange for eternal blessing. Both young Hui Muslim activists who acquire their knowledge on Islam from Internet reading and reform-minded Hui clerics who have received their religious education from Islamic countries (the most vehement criticism comes from those who are trained in Saudi Arabia and Pakistan) are among the most outspoken in

voicing their critique, and they often relate this ritual to another common practice that can be found in almost every Hui Islamic ritual, especially those commemorating the deceased that take place on an annual basis in most Hui families: the imams invited to perform the ritual and to recite the Quran are presented with monetary gifts (*jingli*, "the gift for the Quran") and treated with exquisite banquets. The amount of the gift varies across different families, but the common amount is between 10-50 RMB for each participating imam. The critique focuses not upon the act of giving as much as upon the act of receiving, and it is not the contribution of *haidiye* (*hadīa*, "gift") that is objectionable, but the routinization of this supposedly "voluntary" donation and its transformation into a normal and regular source of income for the clerics that are most severely denounced. "The Quran is given a price (*mingma biaojia*), and they recite it to get paid," I was once told by a young Hui in Zhengzhou.

This critique is made all the more convincing by the fact that indeed many imams who engage in this "relationship of exchange" are living in woeful economic conditions: they are poorly paid by the mosque commissions that hire them and the *haidiye* from ritual performance do constitute an important source of income that could help maintain a form of life otherwise unlivable. Those who wage criticisms either do not (care to) understand the economic condition of the imams (e.g. the young Hui activists whose sole concern is to "purify" Islam) or do not at all depend upon *haidiye* for their survival (the clerics with a foreign education often have international connections that can help them acquire foreign funding – this is particularly the case for those who come back from Saudi Arabia and are funded by the latter to spread Wahhabism among the Hui). In the absence of such social institutional arrangements as *waqf* (an inalienable religious

endowment that in traditional Muslim majority societies supports the existence of a politically independent class of Islamic clerics and judges),[33] the routinization of *haidiye* plays a crucial role in providing a relatively stable economic foundation for the existence of the Hui clerics, supplementing their often meager remuneration paid reluctantly by the local mosque commissions. To "purify" Islam in this context amounts to eliminating the material conditions for the continual existence of a large number of ground-level Hui imams (for very few are able to acquire external funding) and it might even pose a grave threat to the basic institutional survival of Hui Islam in the local social world – for what is a mosque without a cleric? The "purification," when mediated by these institutional conditions, might well entail eradication.

It is the complex institutional space in which Hui clerics are inextricably situated that I propose to study in this chapter. I start from discussing how Hui clerics are trained, and how both this training and the positions available after this training are exclusively male-centered, in spite of the existence of the so-called "female imams." That women could take up clerical positions only within certain institutional contexts and that they are confined exclusively within these contexts and given names indexical of such confinement merely reinforces the masculinist imaginary that structures the world of Hui clerical power. In contrast to the strong tendency of localization that can be observed in the mosques that hire them, Hui clerics are involved in a trans-local network characterized by continuous mobility, though some prominent and well established clerics might be able to stay at one mosque for a considerable period of time in their

[33] For the mutual entanglement of the social institution of *waqf* and the Islamic legal system as relatively independent from political intervention, see Hallaq, 2009, pp. 25-221; 2005b, pp. 178-93; 2005a. For the conflicts between modern statehood and the form of social organization upon which the sharī'a is predicated, see Hallaq, 2013.

career (and this long sojourn is ridden with controversies and confrontations, especially clashes with the localized "commission for the democratic management of the mosque" which I have studied in the first chapter). The mobile nature of the clerical position is institutionally determined by the specific position assigned to the clerical power in a mosque and by the network of personal relations the clerics have established in the course of their religious training. In the second section, therefore, I move on to unpack the mobile nature of the clerical position, focusing particularly upon why and how the Hui clerics move, whether they take their families while they are moving, how they sustain their livelihood in this incessant movement, for what social insurance and medical benefits – if any – they qualify as forms of protection against unpredictable adversities in life, and who pays for this critical financial support indispensable for the maintenance of a livable life. By way of conclusion, I circle back to the question of ritual performance and the ritual functions a Hui cleric often has to fulfill as a crucial component of his job obligation. I hope the reader can be more able to situate this ritual role of clerics within the general institutional space I have outlined in this chapter.

Training the Cleric

Imam Zhu, one of the clerics working in Down Mosque in Zhengzhou, always insisted to me that "a mosque is nothing if it does not have its own school." To him, "a mosque is defined by the kind of education it is able to offer." But it is not always clear, however, what kind of education he was proposing and more specifically, who should be the students that he thought need to be educated and for what particular purpose. Although it is generally clear that he meant an "Islamic education," a "religious education" distinguished from the "secular education" propagated by the Chinese state and taught in

the official public educational system, there are nonetheless at least two kinds of "Islamic education" which a mosque often offers and which are not always compatible in their competition to share faculty and economic resources. One kind, dubbed as *jingtang jiaoyu* ("scriptural hall education"), intends specifically to train Hui clerics and to provide a comprehensive education in Quranic recitation and interpretation, critical reading and analysis of *Ḥadīth*, the grammar and rhetoric of classical Arabic and classical Persian (with emphasis placed on Arabic)[34], Islamic jurisprudence and a basic knowledge of the enormous corpus of legal commentaries in the Islamic tradition (primarily the Ḥanafī school, the dominant *madhhad* among the Hui). The second kind, much less professional and demanding, is more of a popular educational program that features recitation (instead of interpretation) of short and commonly used Quranic verses (such as *Al-Ikhlāṣ*, the 112th and one of the most widely used *suwar* [plural of *sūra*] of the Quran) and accessible Chinese commentaries on *Ḥadīth*. Instead of systematically training a young student into a qualified and knowledgeable cleric able to preside over the variety of rituals that often take place in the context of a local mosque, the program for popular education intends to pass on to those who attend a basic knowledge of the Islamic religion and to build a local community of lay believers in the *fang* where the mosque is located. With completely different purposes and speaking to totally different people, these two types of education which often run parallel in a mosque nonetheless co-exist in a relationship of uneasy tension, with the training of clerics and the monopoly of specialized religious expertise

[34] An important exception needs to be registered. According to Shui Jingjun, Hui Muslim women's education and the training of female clerics put much emphasis on Persian religious texts: "All traditional textbooks for women's education were in Persian, the most fundamental five of which were called *nvrenjing* (scriptures for women)." (Jaschok & Shui, 2000, pp. 87). See Jaschok & Shui, 2000, pp. 68-99; Jaschok, 2012. I will discuss more extensively the training of female clerics later in this chapter.

increasingly marginalized by the daily growing demand for the popularization of easily accessible and memorable knowledge of the Islamic teaching.

This marginalization acquires its vividness in a scenario which involved precisely Imam Zhu. Although Down Mosque still held at least four to five students in residence who would line up in front of the prayer hall to collectively perform the call for prayer at designated times, Imam Zhu still insisted that "there are no more students under training in Zhengzhou." "Those you see," he explained as I put to him the counter-evidence, "they will eventually leave this profession. They are here just for a temporary stay, and they are not motivated to learn. Many of those who graduated in the past several years have turned to a different path, and few remain to become a cleric. Everyone wants to make money, and it's not worth staying in a mosque."

Before I had time to ask Zhu why those who had found other jobs upon graduation decided to receive clerical training in the first place, Laozhang, director of Down's "commission for democratic management," rushed in from outside and interrupted our conversation with his characteristically high-pitched voice, announcing that the form for the "annual self-check" (*niandu zijian*) had been distributed by the district bureau of religious affairs and must be filled in time and returned within three days. "Can you help us with this damn form?" Pleased to find me with Imam Zhu, Laozhang did not hesitate to ask me for a favor.

In addition to the basic information such as name of the presiding cleric, number of houses owned by the mosque, annual income from rents and voluntary donations, and the specific street address of the mosque, the form also demanded detailed information on

every single one of the students who had studied or were then studying in the mosque for the past five years. Aside from name, age of entry, and years spent in Down, the form also asked for the hometown of each student, as most of them were in fact from outside Zhengzhou – some even from provinces other than Henan (one student, particularly, came from Liaoning Province in northeast China). Since clerical training was not considered to be a "normal" job and the Down commission, as a "civil organization" distinguished from a registered "employer," was not qualified to provide legal sponsorship that could move the household registry (*hukou*) of the students from their hometowns to Zhengzhou, all outside students, just like their non-local teachers (Imam Zhu was not registered in Zhengzhou either), had to obtain a "certificate for temporary residence" (*zanzhu zheng*) from the Municipal Public Security Bureau. The "annual self-check," though prescribed primarily by the local bureau of religious affairs, nonetheless went beyond the "religious field" – the control of the movement of population and the surveillance of flows that might be seen as potentially disruptive to the "stable social order" painstakingly maintained by the local government were equally crucial components of this administratively imposed screening of sites for religious activities (*zongjiao huodong changsuo*).

But it was hard to keep track of things, especially when, as Imam Zhu said, "there are no more students under training in Zhengzhou" and "everyone wants to make money." "Can you remember how many we've had in the past five years?" Laozhang asked Zhu, but before waiting for the latter to reply, he continued, "I know Malin graduated last year, and there might have been another two…No, perhaps four…Is it four? Where are they now?" Imam Zhu remained silent.

"Perhaps they have taken up clerical positions somewhere?" I probed hesitantly.

"No, I don't think so. I don't recall any of that." Laozhang seemed pretty sure, "Malin is still dangling out there (*zai waimian huang zhe ne*). He still doesn't have a job. I heard he wanted to continue his studies in Saudi Arabia. But he needs to find a job first. He spent three years here. But there are just too many students – there aren't that many clerical openings. They just have to find some other job. Well, speaking of jobs, why don't *you* get a job? Why are *you* here all the time?"

Embarrassed by this unsolicited question and wary of having every time to remind him of my job as an anthropologist (in fact, his conflation of me with the students was indicative of how my work – talking to the imams, staying all day observing the daily happenings in the mosque, posing questions that were so obvious as not to deserve to be answered, etc. – fit into the local imaginary, and my age and interest made this conflation all the more smooth), I only said that I was still in a job search. To Laozhang, three years was a long time for Islamic training, especially for young students: "They could learn much faster than we old people do – it takes us a few weeks to memorize one or two verses, but they can do it in days. And we have to spend months to learn the Arabic alphabet, but it takes them merely one or two weeks. What's the point of staying that long?"

It is somewhat surprising to find two diametrically opposed views on such a central question within the apparently limited context of a local mosque and between two figures that know each other well and work closely on a daily basis. Contrary to Zhu's pessimistic view that *jingtang jiaoyu* is in a state of stagnation and deterioration in the

face of alternative economic options, Laozhang insisted that three years – "too short" according to Zhu's ideal standard – was still too long, and the lack of clerical openings and the superfluity of graduates (instead of their shortage) demanded the latter assume a more positive attitude in seeking opportunities elsewhere beyond the pursuit of religious knowledge (which was precisely what Imam Zhu criticized). The insufficiency of clerical openings was a fact well acknowledged by both Laozhang and Imam Zhu, but it was the solution and the reason behind this solution that set them apart and reveal the divergence in view entailed largely by the respective institutional position each occupies in the mosque. Note how Laozhang compared the students to "we the old people." The point of comparison he found most salient was the memorization of commonly used Quranic verses and the mastery of basic Arabic alphabet. He did not mention the advanced work of interpretation and commentary on the textual subtleties of the Quran; neither was he concerned with the more demanding work in acquiring a firm knowledge of Arabic grammar and rhetoric, both crucial for a comprehensive clerical training and required especially for critically addressing jurisprudential questions. That three years is "too long" is an evaluation that can make sense only when this complex system of training is reduced completely to the framework of a popular education. For Laozhang, it seems, the only form of Islamic education imaginable, or at least worth working for, is the wide popularization of a basic understanding of Quran and a preliminary knowledge of the rules and methods of its recitation (not necessarily the whole Quran, and more often only its abridged selections). In order to understand how this point of view comes to be shared by him and many of his other fellow non-clerical Hui Muslims, and why there exists such a blatant disparity between this view and that represented by Imam Zhu, we need to

compare more carefully both the substantive content and the institutional conditions of *jingtang jiaoyu* with the popular educational program, both taking the local mosque as their major front but pulling it in essentially different – even opposed – directions.

The emergence of *jingtang jiaoyu* is often located by scholars at a particularly significant juncture in the history of the Hui. It is said to have been established by Hu Dengzhou (1522-1597), a learned Hui Confucian scholar born in Shaanxi Province in late Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), at a time when "there was a shortage of books [and] learned man were few and far between and the transmission and interpretation [of the texts] were not clear" (Ben-Dor Benite, 2005, pp. 41; see also Zhao, 1989). Well trained in Confucian classics and frustrated by his incapacity (like many of his fellow Hui) to read the Islamic classics written in Arabic and Persian, Hu travelled – according to popular historical narrative whose truthfulness could hardly be verified – to Mecca and Medina for a systematic religious training. The curriculum he formulated upon his return and which took the mosque as its primary location for development is divided into three parts each following the other as an advancement along the ladder of Islamic learning. The first phase, often dubbed *qingzhen xiaoxue* ("the elementary schooling of the pure and true [religion]")[35], consists primarily of a basic education in Arabic alphabet, recitation of short Quranic verses (these recitations are not necessarily accompanied by interpretations,

[35] The term *qingzhen* ("pure and true") cuts across different religious traditions in China. Although it might have originated from Daoism, both Judaism and Islam in China have appropriated this word to designate their own religious tradition. A synagogue, for instance, used to be called a *qingzhen si*, exactly the same name as a mosque was and continues to be called in Chinese. Islam, in addition to being named "the Hui religion" (*huijiao*) in the imperial period, was also called *qingzhen jiao* ("the pure and true teaching/religion"). It was only up until 1956 after the Communist Party assumed power that both *huijiao* and *qingzhen jiao* were officially abolished and replaced by the transliteration *yisilan jiao*, now accepted as the authoritative Chinese rendition of Islam (State Council, 1956). For a general overview of the Jewish diaspora in China, with a particular focus on Henan, see Xu, 2003. See Gladney, 1991pp. 7-15 for a brief discussion on the significance of the word *qingzhen* among Hui Muslims. Instead of designating a religious tradition in general, *qingzhen* now becomes increasingly synonymous with halal among the Hui, particularly in reference to the Islamic dietary restriction against the consumption of pork.

and the students might only have a vague idea of the general meanings of the verses recited – mechanical recitation instead of intellectual understanding takes center stage), and affirmation of one's faith in the Oneness of God without, however, being taught the more advanced knowledge in *tawḥīd*. Two textbooks are most commonly used in this phase, and both are pamphlets complied by an enormous number of teachers whose names have over the years been consigned to oblivion: *zaxue* ("miscellaneous studies"), a collection of basic points that demonstrate succinctly the essence of the Islamic religion and the ritual details in performing daily prayers, and *haitie* (*khātim*, "conclusion"), a selection of 18 short and easily memorable verses at the end of the Quran, in addition to other commonly used verses such as *Al-Fātiḥa*. The time spent on this first phase ranges from one to three years, depending on the effort put in by the students.

The second phase, *qingzhen zhongxue* ("the secondary schooling of the pure and true [religion]"), is *de facto* the inception of the systematic training that distinguishes *jingtang jiaoyu* from a popular Islamic education to which the primary schooling still in part belongs. The mark of this transformation is the teaching of *suanlefu* (*ṣarf*), the Arabic morphology in the constitution of words. In a twisted manner, however, this book was initially taught not in Chinese – which was already the native language spoken by the Hui at the time when Hu founded *jingtang jiaoyu* – but in Persian, due largely to the heavy influence of Persian migrants in the Chinese medieval era on the teaching and interpretation of Islam among the Hui. The difficulty in learning the basics of a new language (Arabic) by means of another no less unfamiliar language (Persia) made the study of *suanlefu* particularly demanding and forced many students to quit shortly after they entered the second phase. This linguistic barrier was gradually eliminated in the

1950s by reform-minded Hui imams who replaced Persia with Chinese as the dominant language in teaching Arabic morphology (Ding, 2006, pp. 52; 2012; Yu, 1986). The emphasis of the secondary schooling is on linguistic training, equipping the students with solid language skills (Arabic taking center stage, and Persian on the side as an ancillary assistance, increasingly marginalized in the curriculum especially due to Iran's Shi'ism) required by advanced learning in the interpretation of Quran and legal commentaries. The third phase, *qingzhen daxue* ("the grand learning of the pure and true [religion]"), focuses upon Arabic rhetoric, the enormous corpus of legal commentaries that belong specifically to the Ḥanafī school, critical analysis and interpretation of *Ḥadīth*, Islamic theology, and Sufi classics.[36] Although a core curriculum of thirteen books (*shisan ben jing*) are often prescribed for a complete clerical training, in actual practice, each teacher might either subtract certain books or, as is more often the case, incorporate works of his or her own choice. Advanced Quranic commentaries, such as *Tafsir al Kabir* ("The Great Interpretation") by Muqatil ibn Sulayman and *Tafsir ibn Kathir* ("The Ibn Kathir Interpretation") by Ibn Kathir, are also used as indispensable references and occasionally textbooks treated with utter care and rigorous intellectual exercise.

The higher one progresses in this three-tiered educational system, the more time one needs to spend in order to attain the goal of mastery, naturally for the reason that the further one approaches the top, the more difficult the materials one has to study. Not a single imam that I have known in my fieldwork – however bright and hard-working he

[36] Certain Sufi classics, such as 'Abd Rahman Jami's *Ashi'at Al-Lamā'at* [Rays of the Flashes], are also taught and studied among self-avowedly non-Sufi Hui clerics. It is also critical to note that most of these works are written in Persian and continue to be studied in this language in contemporary mosque education, although, as I have mentioned previously, Persian is being increasingly peripheralized in this curriculum. For the influence of Sufi thought on key figures in Hui Islam in the late imperial period, see Murata et al., 2000, 2009; Frankel, 2011; Petersen, 2006, 2013, 2012.

might be – can finish this curriculum within five years, and some even argued, without hesitation, that one had to put in ten to fifteen years in order to have a real idea of what *jingtang jiaoyu* actually taught, and this duration was only for those "who are smart enough." Zhengfeng, a brilliant Hui born into a prestigious imam family in Gansu Province in northwest China, decided to turn to clerical training upon graduation from the prestigious Peking University with a Bachelor's degree in philosophy and religious studies. I knew him while I was in college (he was two years below me) and met him again when I was in Henan, when he was on a trip to visit his mother who was a female imam in a small mosque on the outskirts of Zhengzhou (more on the female imams later in this chapter). Already quite knowledgeable before he embarked upon *jingtang jiaoyu* due primarily to his family education, Zhengfeng was in the phase of *qingzheng zhongxue* ("the secondary schooling") after only one year's study. "I have been working very hard in the past year," he told me, "I got sick multiple times because of long hours of incessant working. An acute rash almost killed me once. The mosque where I studied was too humid, and my body was covered in sores. I tried to persist, but finally had to give in. I was in a coma and was hospitalized for weeks, before my family came and took me home." He then proceeded to tell me about his aspiration,

> I can already engage in in-depth discussions with learned imams, and the one year I spent is tantamount to three to four years for a regular student. But still, it will take a long time. There are so many books to read and to study carefully, and there are still many classics which I now do not understand. Some people think one can finish *jingtang jiaoyu* in three years. They are dead wrong. It's not a question of talent. You just need at least ten years, because that's simply the minimum time for you to know all this stuff. It's a matter of time. If you want to be a serious student and an eminent cleric, you have to put in that much time. There's absolutely no shortcut (*meiyou jiejing*).

This view was shared by Imam Zhu, who insisted that "you have to be able to persevere – no one can shorten the journey." But *jingtang jiaoyu* does not happen in a pure space of religious learning exempt from the complexity of concrete socio-economic institutional arrangements. Different from many traditional Muslim majority societies where a self-sustaining system of social charity called *waqf* (an inalienable religious endowment) supports the existence of a politically independent (to different extents in accordance with different places and historical epochs) class of religious clerics, juris-consultants (*muftī*), and authoritative judges (*qāḍī*), mosques and their landed property have never been completely subject to the control of religious clerics among the Hui, despite that in pre-Communist days, the Hui clerics in certain places did possess more power than their colleagues elsewhere. There certainly existed and continue to exist regional variations, and clerics in northwest China, at least according to my fieldwork, generally wield more power than their counterparts in eastern China. But Hui imams have never been and continue not to be economically independent in their clerical position. As I have argued in the first chapter, mosques in contemporary China are legally prescribed to be the communal property of the *fang*s in which they are located. The localized "commission for the democratic management of the mosque," staffed completely by local elders, *de jure* excludes the intervention of clerical power in deciding on the disposal of mosque property. How many students an imam could take on and what logistical condition he can be offered depend upon how much funding is allotted to him by the commission for whom he works. Since *jingtang jiaoyu* is free of charge and all student expenses – from food and lodging, to clothes and daily utilities – are covered by the grants assigned by the commission, both the clerical power and the training of the prospective clerics have to

succumb to the whim and stinginess of the local "trustees." Although all students are provided basic sustenance, most students continue to depend upon the funding of their own families for daily expenses that go beyond accommodation. In some cases when the commission is particularly stingy due to the limited amount of income it could collect, it is the students who often have to suffer the gravest consequences (their teachers, on the other hand, are slightly better paid).

Zhengfeng's first teacher was an imam in the county of Minhe in Qinghai Province. "The imam was quite knowledgeable in the interpretation of the Holy Quran and was known for this in the clerical circle," he told me, "so my family wanted him to lead me into *jingtang jiaoyu*." But the mosque where the imam served his term, however, was in abject economic condition and could hardly afford to provide him and his students with comfortable accommodation. "I ate tons of cabbage, and almost forgot what meat tasted like." Zhengfeng sighed, and then proceeded to describe what according to him was a "nightmare:" "They have eight huge water tanks. Before the winter came, we were given the money to buy cabbages. I mean, just cabbages. We bought as many as we can and spent all the money – which was not much. We then marinated the cabbages with salt, only salt – because that's the only seasoning we had. Then we stuffed all the salted cabbages into the eight water tanks and pressed them with heavy rocks. We ate cabbages with steamed bread (*mantou*) for every meal every single day. And we had to calculate carefully, since that's all we had for the entire winter. If we ate up all the cabbages before spring came, I didn't know what would happen." He paused, and then continued, "Well, I fell sick when we were at the fourth, and I left before that one was emptied."

Students are often closely watched by members of the commission, who seize every possible chance to blame them for improper behaviors such as indulgence in playing, liberal spending (such as buying a new cell phone with the money sent by their families), and most often, indolence and lack of interest in learning. Zhengfeng, because of his college degree from a renowned university and his family background, was well respected by the commission of the mosque where he studied. But most other students did not share this fortune. Coming predominantly from rural families (at least those I interviewed), most of them are in their mid-teens when they are sent for *jingtang jiaoyu* by their families (in contrast to Zhengfeng, who was in his early twenties when he began his clerical training). With merely a junior high diploma (many in fact have not even finished junior high school), they are often seen by the commission as "losers" and "drop-outs" who could not find other possible options than being set on a path to becoming a Hui cleric, which could at least earn them a living and might even provide them with a decent job if they could persist through the difficult years. A knowledgeable and well-connected imam still commands much respect, especially if his position is buttressed by a nominal political post such as representative in the local CPPCC (Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference). But students, only very few of whom could after years of struggling eventually land in one of those positions, are invariably looked upon with much suspicion and contempt. The training of the Hui clerics is indeed funded by the local commission on the income from the communal property possessed by the mosque, but this precarious endowment is ridden with reluctance and disdain. Even Zhengfeng was occasionally questioned in a contemptuous tone: "You have a college degree from Peking University. Why not find a real job?"

Women are not completely excluded from receiving clerical education, and some can even become imams after rigorous training. Maria Jaschok and Shui Jingjun have documented and investigated a large number of women's mosques and interviewed numerous female imams ("*nv ahong*" [37]) primarily in Henan Province, which has a long tradition in developing women's Islamic education. Most women's mosques which I came across in my fieldwork bear one of two modes of relationship with the men's mosques from which they initially split off: either they still keep a nominally dependent relationship with the latter (this dependence could at times take more concrete forms such as sharing a fraction of the latter's annual budget), or they acquire complete independence by being registered with the local bureau of religious affairs and obtaining official recognition from the state as self-sustaining "sites for religious activities" (*zongjiao huodong changsuo*). Although a women's mosque and a men's mosque might share the same *fang*, the former could nonetheless apply to the local government for an independent status, seeking its "self-determination" on the basis of gender equality. Most women's mosques, however, are short in funding. Practically sharing the same *fang*s with their male counterparts, they often do not possess as much property as the latter, for the simple reason that the strained resources of one local community could hardly support two mosques in equal measure and most donations are directed towards men's mosques. Women's mosques often evolved from women's Islamic schools previously held in segregated quarters of men's mosques, and this primary concentration on education that still remains dominant in contemporary women's mosques relegates the latter to an

[37] The Persian word *ahong* (or *akhong*, "the scholar") is commonly used among the Hui to designate Islamic clerics. In contrast to imam which is occasionally reserved only for those who are actually employed by a mosque commission to lead prayers, *ahong* can be used more widely, without necessarily implying whether the one thus designated is indeed presiding over a mosque.

obscure position that only partially qualifies as a real "mosque" in the local patriarchal world. We need to be more careful as to how this partiality manifests itself and whether the women's mosque, though apparently a sign of the improvement upon Muslim women's status in the male-centered local Hui world, is nonetheless marked by fundamental insufficiencies that should make us pause before celebrating them as commendable instances of a more general Chinese Islamic feminist tradition awaiting excavation (Tatlow, 2012a; 2012b. I will discuss the question of gender in the epilogue.).

What a female imam could do is not necessarily confined within the women's mosque where she assumes her clerical position. It is not uncommon to see a female imam addressing a mixed audience consisting both of Hui men and women in a classroom provided by the men's mosque. In the domain of popular Islamic education, segregation of gender is seldom observed either in the student body or in the employment of teachers. In contrast to this apparent gender-neutrality in the realm of education, the ritual space is strictly segregated along gender lines. A woman can pray in a men's mosque and follow the lead of a male imam, standing behind all the males, separated from them by a heavy curtain and covered by a *ḥijāb* (*niqāb*, "the veil," on the other hand, is rare), but a man is strictly forbidden from praying in a women's mosque and following the instruction of a female imam in his daily observance of Islamic duties. On the one hand, it might appear that women are given more freedom and in addition to a religious space that belongs to them exclusively, they are also free to share a segregated quarter of the male space. The patriarchal structure upon which male authority is predicated paradoxically confines the spatial expanse of the masculinist world and assigns to the Muslim women a more protected and even privileged place in the distribution of religious

space. On the other, however, the picture shifts completely if we do not stop at marveling at the "independence" of the women's mosque, however much a remarkable achievement it might appear to be. The "protected" space of the women's mosque presupposes its utter irrelevance for the male-centered world – women's mosques are not so much protected as ignored. The exclusivity of the female space does not necessarily mean the success of resistance or the firm establishment of a female standing *within* the masculinist world. This exclusivity could itself be a sign of its exclusion – independence does not necessarily bring about the transformation of the patriarchal world. It could equally mean separation and segregation – it does not change the male world as much as it retreats into its own isolation, closing in upon itself and rendered impertinent and negligible.

A female imam can preside over daily prayers and the weekly Jumu'ah for her female followers within the small space of her own mosque. But she cannot – at least I haven't known a single case that contradicts this proposition – lead other collective rituals that figure prominently in the life cycle of a Hui Muslim, either male or female. She is never invited to recite Quranic verses on annual familial rituals commemorating deceased relatives. Neither is she qualified to lead Janāza prayers, even when the departed is a woman. All communal rituals that take place outside the female religious space (– and all communal rituals, as a matter of fact, take place outside this space) are presided over exclusively by male clerics. Women are certainly not excluded from participating in these rituals (*Janāza* prayer, however, is exclusively male both in its leadership and in its participation), but women's mosques are invariably devoted to the self-enclosed education of Hui women and the performance of highly personal religious duties. They exist materially side by side with the dominant masculinist world, but they remain

symbolically invisible to the latter, not to mention integrated into it in such a way as to fundamentally transform its structural organization. Once when I personally encountered a scenario when a few Hui women were engaged in a particularly heated dispute on the management of the women's mosque that still partially depended upon Down Mosque for its daily maintenance, Imam Hai, a young male cleric of Down who witnessed this scene right by my side, smirked and whispered to me, "They are people of the women's mosque." Seeing that I still could not understand, he added, "You know [with a wink – as if I should have known all along, as if this is purely common sense], women's mosques always have more trouble. (*nvsi shi bijiao duo*)"

It is therefore a questionable stance in arguing that the existence of women's mosques in Zhengzhou (or in other places – for they also exist both in Yunnan and Ningxia, where I have encountered them in the fieldtrips) is necessarily conducive to the improvement upon Hui Muslim women's status in the patriarchal world. Marginalization and exclusion could well entail a spatial domestication which precisely requires the institution of a materially rooted space of confinement in which sexual difference is given a legible form which nonetheless is seen (suppose it is seen at all) not to deserve recognition. The critical point that I think we should pay attention to is not merely how Muslim women carve out a "space of their own" in the male-centered world, but whether their intervention can relocate them *within* the patriarchal world and whether this relocation can be structurally cathected in such a way as to induce a foundational restructuration of the libidinal economy that underwrites the organization of the masculinist world. Women's mosques, given their contemporary self-enclosure and continual exclusion from the male-centered world, can hardly produce the necessary focalization that brings

sexual difference into the visible field and re-structures the symbolic of the Hui patriarchal world.

The complex arrangement of *jingtang jiaoyu*, especially its demanding curriculum, is rarely the concern of the localized commission. They surely provide the minimum funding necessary for its normal operation, but they are not as worried about the training of prospective clerics as the disgruntled clerics themselves do, often complaining about the stinginess of the commission in their refusal to expand the budget distributed to *jingtang jiaoyu*. But in contrast to this lukewarm attitude to the training of future clerics, the commission is much more passionate and generous in funding popular educational programs. Every weekday after the Maghrib prayer, Down Mosque offers a one-hour class on Arabic alphabet and Quranic recitation. Every Thursday morning from 9 am to 11 am, a longer class on the interpretation of *Ḥadīth* is provided for those who are interested. Other courses such as Arabic and Chinese calligraphy are also taught by prominent local calligraphers invited both by the clerics and by the well-connected members of the commission. Imam Mai, the leading cleric of Down, was particularly proud of these courses which he saw as laudable achievements unrivalled by other mosques: “People from as far as Hebei Province would call in and place orders on our textbook. They all want to learn from us.”

Different from *jingtang jiaoyu* whose benefits accrue to the students who will sooner or later graduate or move to a different mosque and follow a different teacher for more advanced studies, a well-organized and multi-tiered popular educational program would benefit the ordinary Hui Muslims living in the *fang* and by virtue of this boost the popularity of the local commission. *Fang*s located close to each other often engage in an

undeclared competition, vying for prestige in spreading basic knowledge of Islam in their local communities. The primary goal is to produce a high degree of familiarity with *zaxue* and *haitie* among the general population in the local community. Those *fang*s that include a considerable number of Hui residents who could recite more Quranic verses beyond the commonly used 18 *suwar* are often looked upon with admiration and the commission that serves that *fang* is often commended for this remarkable accomplishment. Laozhang, the director of Down's commission, could recite the whole Quran and was among the most avid supporters for expanding the current popular educational program of his mosque. Compared to *jingtang jiaoyu*, whose long cycle is necessitated by the complexity of its curriculum and which, moreover, only produces students such as Malin who "are still dangling out there" due to the lack of openings and the excessive number of graduates, the positive effect of popular education is much more tangible and immediately perceptible to the commission. The costs of popular education are much lower, too. Only a classroom has to be provided, and no food and lodging are required.

An important tendency gradually emerges out of this sharp contrast whose future ramifications might well transform the institutional existence of Hui Islam in the local world. The popularization of Islamic knowledge and the rise in religious consciousness in the local Hui population as a result of this spread of knowledge are predicated precisely upon the draining of economic and faculty resources from the training of religious clerics. Imam Mai of Down Mosque, for instance, was so busy teaching the popular courses as to have little time left to instruct his own students. Both rigorous Islamic scholarship and specialized religious expertise are increasingly displaced by the desire for the popularization of accessible knowledge simplified for easy memorization. "Perhaps after

a decade," Imam Zhu once told me, "many ordinary Hui would have a higher level of Islamic knowledge, but where would you be able to find clerics? And what is a mosque without an imam?" It was not "the decline of Islam" – an obscure conception that could mean many different things – as much as the gradual dissolution of the most concrete and actual institutional existence of Hui Islam, i.e. the mosque and the clerics that staff it, that he was most concerned with. Below the surface of the vibrant popular Islamic education, he discerned a hidden danger that with the progression of time might seriously threaten the continual flourishing of Hui Islam in the local social world. The commission which hired him did not know, and neither did they seem to care. But seen from the position of a Hui cleric, Islam does not acquire its traction merely by clinging to people's minds. It has to rely on robust institutional arrangements such as the mosque and the clerical institution for its continual existence and tenacity. To Imam Zhu, it is precisely these arrangements that are endangered by the rapid growth of popular education.

Mobile Islam

Few students of *jingtang jiaoyu* acquire their complete education only at one mosque and from only one teacher. More commonly, they travel vast distances in pursuit of knowledge, often with a recommendation from their old teachers who direct them to new places where they could find the mentor able to lead them further down the road. Imam Shui, who was the presiding cleric in a mosque in Hubei Province but whose home was in Luoyang, Henan Province, recounted to me his own experience in seeking out prominent religious scholars in his student years. "I travelled extensively in the Northwest when I was a student," he said, "We had a team, me and several of my classmates from the mosque where I used to study. Each of us carried a bundle – all our

properties were in them. We were well treated at every mosque we visited, although – of course – there was a difference between the attitude of the imams and the attitude of the local people." Then he proceeded to relate to me a particularly impressive scenario which continued to amaze him at the moment of our conversation,

> Once we visited an old imam in Qinghai. He was no longer leading a mosque, but continued to teach students. We had already heard that he was an expert on the interpretation and critical analysis of *Ḥadīth*. Upon knowing that we were students, he was quite happy and insisted that we have lunch at his place. He demonstrated to us how he taught *Ḥadīth*. It was amazing: whenever you asked him about a particular piece, he would open up his books, and for every single time – I don't know how he did that – the page that turned up was precisely the one where this piece could be found. He then proceeded, effortlessly with words flowing like clear water from the mouth of an inexhaustible spring, to explain to us the background behind this piece, the particular category under which it was subsumed in the general system of *Ḥadīth* classification, from whom it was initially recorded and the line of reporters – even including who were more reliable than others, what had been said and written on this piece by previous scholars and whose views might be more persuasive than others. He was accurate yet his tone soft. He was strict yet not intimidating. He had been teaching *Ḥadīth* for his entire life, and the words have practically melted in his blood. He is still the best teacher I have ever met.

Few Hui families choose to send their children to a local mosque for clerical training. Although it is often one's own communal mosque that lays the foundation for the first phase of *jingtang jiaoyu*, many families choose to send their children afar and deliberately to unfamiliar locales so they could be effectively cut off from any familial comfort into which they could retreat when the study becomes too demanding and escape almost inevitably becomes an attractive option. Before the commencement of the official training, separation is the first lesson they need to take to heart, and this at times heart-wrenching separation initiates a career which itself is marked by numerous partitions and incessant movements. The private family lost is compensated by the communal family gained in the mosque where *jingtang jiaoyu* takes place. Imam Chen, currently working

in Yunnan Province but whose home was also in Luoyang, Henan Province, still remembered the happy yet austere days in the 1980s when he and his classmates often woke up at midnight to look for food in the mosque kitchen: “We were in our teens, and you know how much you can eat at that age. But the mosque only provided two meals – one in the morning around 9 am, the other in the afternoon around 5 pm, and we in fact had to cook ourselves. There was not much to eat, actually. Just steamed bread and pickles, every day. We didn’t have any fat (*youshui*) or protein (*danbai*). So we were always hungry. We often woke up around midnight and tried painstakingly to find whatever food that could still be found in the mosque. Sometimes we would cluster together and one of us would tell a story on a particularly delicious dish which he had before. He had to describe it really vividly, to the point where we could almost taste it. Imagine the saliva! How can you forget that?”

To follow the same teacher and to suffer hunger together (which is a common experience among most imams whom I have interviewed) at a place where one could only rely on one’s peers for both material and moral support creates a strong and long-lasting friendship among the young students that reaches far beyond the years of their clerical training. The extensiveness of an imam’s collegial network depends largely upon how many classmates he has had and how many teachers he has followed in his training, and these two translate directly into how widely he travelled and whether he was able in his student years to integrate himself into the immense web of relations that connect Hui clerics and teachers across vast geographical distance. This Hui tradition of trans-local networking in the pursuit of Islamic knowledge and clerical training dates back to late imperial days, reaching as far back as the late Ming (1368-1644) and early Qing (1644-

1911) Dynasties. Zvi Ben-Dor Benite, for instance, has meticulously documented the formation and specific constitution of this networking among the so-called "Hui Confucians" (*huiru*) in the imperial period, focusing more particularly on the urban context in eastern China where the Chinese literary tradition figured prominently and placed much influence on the particular form Hui Islamic learning assumed at that historical juncture (Ben-Dor Benite, 2005).

But the network an imam slowly built up in his student years functions not merely as a crucial source for the pursuit of knowledge. Perhaps no less importantly, it could also provide possible job opportunities. Information on clerical openings are not posted on newspapers, but passed on among closely related imams. Both Imam Yang of Journey Mosque and Imam Li of a small mosque in Liaoning Province in northeast China were students of Imam Mai Rongxi, an eminent Hui cleric in Henan renowned for his extraordinary contribution to the restoration and re-invigoration of Islamic scholarship and clerical training in Henan after the devastation of the Cultural Revolution. On a short vacation to pay his old classmate a visit and to share his working experience, Imam Li also brought news on a clerical opening in a small Hui village close to where he worked. That it was him and not others who brought the news was not irrelevant to the job itself. As I have previously mentioned, although a total of thirteen textbooks are often addressed in *jingtang jiaoyu*, each particular teacher, due to his own preference, personal training, and academic judgment, might subtract certain books while incorporating others which he considers important. The particular way the Quran is recited (the speed, the tone, the melody, etc.) might also differ between different schools initiated by different teachers

who acquire their training from different Islamic traditions.[38] The job Imam Li brought to the attention of Imam Yang was specifically tailored for a student trained in the scholarly tradition from which both of them emerged, and it was perhaps unsurprising that they wanted to reserve the position exclusively for their own students – or in this case, students of Imam Yang. Both the accessibility of job opportunities and the particular requirements of job openings are deeply embedded in the collegial network of Hui clerics. A good teacher must be able not only to pass on to his students a body of rigorous Islamic scholarship. He must also be able to land them in clerical positions which in turn add to his own eminence and the influence of his own school.

It is precisely at this place that the world of a "female imam" (*nv ahong*) differs perhaps most drastically from that of her male colleagues. There hardly exists a "network" among the widely scattered women's mosques, and travelling, moreover, figures much less prominently for a female cleric than it does for a male one. The predominance of "education" in a women's mosque and the common assumption that it is built primarily and perhaps even exclusively only for spreading the knowledge of Islam among the local Hui women seriously limit the range of activities a female imam can engage in and her scope of travel. More often than not, the most a female imam could do (and not necessarily with success) is to pass her own position to one of her students when she decides to retire. There might be potential job openings which may come up occasionally

[38] Both Imam Yang and Imam Li belong to the *Yihewani* tradition, established in China by Ma Wanfu (*guoyuan hazhi*, "the Orchard Hajj") in late 19th century, after the latter adopted Wahhbi teaching on his Hajj to Mecca. Although *Yihewani* is a transliteration of the Arabic word *ikhwan* ("brothers"), the Chinese Hui *Yihewani* movement did not and still does not name itself "Muslim brotherhood" and is organizationally independent from the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood established by Hasan al-Banna. The rise of Yihewani in northwest China in late 19th and early 20th centuries was particularly instrumental for the rising Hui warlords in breaking the organizational and military power of Sufi *menhuan*s, accused by the "reformers" as "backward" and "superstitious" with their "saint worship." See Lipman, 1997, pp. 200-11; Lipman, 1984; Chang, 2007.

thanks primarily to the limited connections a female imam might possess with her colleagues (both male and female) elsewhere, but the lack of a systematic network of enduring relations in which information and personnel keep constant circulation ultimately renders these opportunities rare and difficult to track down.

More can be said on the marginal position of the female imam. The common designation they bear is *nv ahong*. The marker of gender, *nv* ("female"), instead of functioning merely as a descriptive indication of sexual difference (suppose that this constative "description" is at all possible – which itself is a masculinist ideological gesture), is an indispensable component that points up the specific position that women are given to inhabit – the word *nan ahong* ("male ahong") is a redundant doubling, while one cannot omit *nv* ("female") in *nv ahong*. An *ahong* is immediately assumed to be a man – the existence and circulation of the word *nv ahong* does not change as much as reinforces the foundational gender dissymmetry which defines the classificatory scheme subtending the usage of the word *ahong* (and "imam"). The patriarchal game of the signifier goes ever further. The wife of a male *ahong* is often given the name *shimu*. The literal rendition of the word is "mother of the teacher," but *mu*, in addition to meaning "mother," is also a generalized marker of the female gender (a hen, for instance, is called *mu*-ji). *Shimu*, therefore, could mean "the female [dependent] of the [male] master." The insertion of "dependent" in this gloss is supported by another linguistic asymmetry that runs parallel to the one that defines *nv ahong*: although the wife of a male *ahong* is called *shimu*, there is a blatant lack of term to designate the male spouse of a *nv ahong*. The literal opposite of *shimu* is *shifu*, which merely means "the master/teacher." But not all husbands of *nv ahong*s are themselves male *ahong*s, and to use *shifu* as a general term to

designate the husbands of *nv ahong*s in the same manner as *shimu* is used as the uniform term to name all wives of the male *ahong*s would simply run contradictory to what can often be empirically observed on the ground. *Shimu* does not have a male counterpart, and the husband of a *nv ahong* gets to keep his own name without being rendered into a subsidiary position, simply because the word does not exist that could fulfill that specific symbolic function.

One crucial distinction, however, has to be drawn between *nv ahong* and *shimu* as two terms that fulfill similar (but not completely the same) symbolic functions in domesticating sexual difference. Contrary to *shimu* which appears in a pair with (male) *ahong* and always refers to the latter, *nv ahong* appears only on its own, standing alone and occupying a somewhat jarring position in the masculinist world. The unease that often accompanies the use of this word is partially dissipated when the actual *nv ahong* designated is married and her husband is also an *ahong* ("male" is as usual omitted) – in other words, when *nv ahong* is simultaneously a *shimu*. The unease is equally ameliorated if the *nv ahong* is a widow, in which case the actual absence of her husband in part renders her sexual identity invisible and her position as an *ahong* – somehow situated outside the gendered social world (note that her male colleague does not have to be thus excluded in order to be recognized) – more imaginable. The symbolic tension built into the term acquires its most manifest form when it is used to designate a *nv ahong* who is married and whose living husband is known to be a lay Hui. Wang Rong, a prominent *nv ahong* born in Henan whose social activism during the Second Sino-Japanese War earned her much respect, was and continues to be known under the name Yang Huizhen, which she was given after being married to Yang Fengxiang, a drug

addict who drained his family of its wealth with his daily increasing appetite for opium. Wang presided over a small women's mosque in Jiaxing, Zhejiang Province, and was often addressed by ordinary Muslims – male and female alike – as Yang *shiniang* (*shiniang* was and is still used interchangeably with *shimu*), despite the well-known fact that her husband was not a male *ahong*. Wang was also occasionally referred to as an *ahong*, but she was not called Wang *ahong* – her last name was completely overwritten by that of her husband: she was called by the name Yang *ahong*, as if, ironically, it was her husband, the locally notorious drug-addict, who was the real *ahong*. In an account given by a female disciple of Imam Wang, she was said to have once protested against this gendered hegemony of naming: "He [meaning her husband] is not an *ahong*. Why call me Yang *shiniang*? Call me Wang *ahong*." Nonetheless, according to the account, "most people still called her Yang *ahong* rather than Wang *ahong*" (Jaschok & Shui, 2000, pp. 277).

We need to be particularly careful as to how one is situated, or perhaps more precisely, how one symbolically situates oneself, when one uses the word *shimu* and *shiniang* to address a female imam. The prevalence and tenacity of this dual term point to a deeper structural configuration that gives it its symbolic power in domesticating sexual difference. To address a female imam as *shimu*/*shiniang* is simultaneously to situate oneself in the patrilineal line which her husband signifies. The teaching of Hui Islam is so symbolically imbricated with this foregrounding of the patriliny that the rule of the patronym can hardly be contradicted by the empirical evidence to the contrary – that her husband was not a male *ahong* did not prevent others from continuing to call Wang Rong Yang *shiniang*. The identification with the patronym locates the addresser (instead of the

addressee) within the patrilineal line and locates him (this "him" could be a male or a female Hui) on the side which only receives women in an essentially dissymmetrical affinal relationship predicated upon a symbolically fundamental exchange of women. *Shimu*/*shiniang* is always the woman who marries into the "door" (*jinmen*) of the (male) *ahong* and who, therefore, acquires her learning only because of being thus incorporated into the patrilineal line (again, whether empirically speaking she obtains her education before this symbolically foundational marriage is irrelevant to the persistence of this structural configuration). A woman cannot be an imam until she is included in the male-centered world by means of exclusion – it is only as a *shimu*/*shiniang* that she could assume the necessarily partial position of a female teacher in the masculinist Hui Islamic teaching.

Occasionally, a Hui woman might also be thrown – either willfully or against her will (it's not always easy to tell the difference) – into a more literal marriage that substantiates this symbolic exchange of women. Imam Mai, the leading cleric of Down Mosque in Zhengzhou, studied for eight months while he was a student in the 1980s at a locally influential mosque in the small city of Changzhi in Shanxi Province. Near the end of his training and while he was preparing to leave for his next destination, his teacher, out of love for a promising and hard-working student who might well become an eminent cleric in the years to come, wanted him to stay. "He has a beautiful daughter," Mai told me while we were driving towards Changzhi for a visit, "and some of my classmates leaked to me that they heard our teacher wanted to give his daughter to me (*ba nv'er gei wo*) so as to chain me to that place. You know, when you have a family there, it's much more

difficult to move on. He wanted me to take his position when he retired." But Mai did not want to stay in Changzhi,

> My home is in Henan. So why on earth would I want to stay there? I called my family to let them know my teacher's plan, and they all suggested I leave immediately, before my teacher even mentioned the marriage to me – you know, you cannot refuse that in his face. I still pretended I didn't know, but one midnight, when everyone was asleep, I quietly packed all my stuff and sneaked out. No one, including my closest classmates, knew that I was leaving on that night. But I succeeded, and they did not find out until the next morning! Haha! My teacher could find some other student to give his daughter to! But it was not going to be me!

As I have argued previously, a male imam, due both to his often extensive travel in his student years and his collegial connections as a result of his teachers' training of multiple students, is wired to an expansive network in which information and personnel keep constant circulating. But the mobility of Hui clerics is not merely a result of clerical training. It is also prompted by the particularly marginal position of the clerical power in the local mosque. This institutional marginalization prompts many imams to look for emotional comfort beyond the circle of their own mosques and within the trans-local network where they find their old classmates and colleagues, many of whom in fact suffer from the same predicament. The peripheral position of clerical power in a mosque is first and foremost grounded in the basic economic relationship that binds the imam to the mosque commission (see chapter 1). There does not exist an established application procedure in the hiring of clerics, and few newly graduated students from *jingtang jiaoyu* would risk self-recommendation – a practice that would at once disqualify him, since a "good graduate" would almost invariably receive a recommendation from his own teacher and the lack of supportive connection is seen as already indicative of his immaturity. Although the recommendation of an eminent imam might land one in a

decent position, it is nonetheless the mosque commission that possesses the legally prescribed and officially recognized power for making the final decision. It is them who *hire* the imam, extending to him a contract with terms and conditions laid down in advance and with the space for negotiation often reduced to minimum (depending upon whether the hired cleric is a prominent imam and whether, in other words, he has more wager in arguing for conditions more advantageous to him).

This relationship of employment is substantiated in clearly defined monetary terms. A new graduate in Zhengzhou might have a salary of 500 RMB per month, while a young but established imam might be paid twice of this amount. 1500 RMB/month is a common amount paid to an experienced imam in his 40s, and few of those clerics whom I interviewed – both in Zhengzhou and in Yinchuan – are paid beyond 2000 RMB. Those who could receive this maximum compensation are often in their mid-40s and highly experienced in maneuvering through the dense human relations that often engulf a local mosque. Whether this amount is sufficient for an imam to sustain his livelihood must be seen in relation to the form of life he is used to and whether he moves with his own family. Imams of different age brackets have different things to worry about and the amount they are paid is often spent in divergent ways: a young and newly graduated cleric would surely find 500 RMB/month an outrageously low salary, since even a bowl of noodles in a cheap restaurant would cost at least 5 RMB in Zhengzhou, and the numerous attractions an urban life brings only make 500 RMB appear unbelievably meager. But for those established imams, a relatively higher monthly salary does not necessarily mean a higher living standard or, for that matter, a more decent life. Imam Hai, the leading and in fact only cleric of Qing Mosque in Zhengzhou (located only

minutes' walk away from Down Mosque and farther away from February 7th Square) and a man in his mid-30s, only received a monthly payment of 900 RMB – certainly higher than new graduates, but hardly sufficient to support his life. His young wife, jobless because she always had to remain ready to move on short notice with her husband to a new position wherever it might be, lived with him in the mosque and cooked for him. They did not have a child – perhaps they could not, since 900 RMB was barely enough for two adults to get by on and absolutely no money could be spared to raise a child (900 RMB was not enough even to pay for half a month's cost for daycare at most kindergartens in Zhengzhou).

Like Imam Hai, many clerics in their 30s and 40s travel with their families in assuming whatever clerical positions that may turn up. Very often, the salary they receive is the only source of income for the entire family, if the *shimu*s/*shiniang*s could not find short-term temporary jobs that could offer alternative compensation to plug the financial hole (which is also one reason why many *shimu*s/*shiniang*s turn to Islamic learning and teach classes to Muslim women in order both to spread religious knowledge and to earn a small amount of remuneration for family use). The regular term for the employment of an imam is three years, occasionally extended to five, and a well-established imam on good terms with the local commission might be able to obtain contracts of multiple terms, in which case his family may be more able to acquire a firm footing in the local community and the *shimu*/*shiniang* may therefore be able to find long-term jobs that could provide a stable source of income. But this possibility is necessarily limited by the rigid household registration system (*hukou*) which only very few select imams (those who have been so successful as to have been given nominal or honorary political posts by the state) have

the privilege and the fortune to bypass. Separation in this context remains the only viable option for many less privileged imams who have to surrender to the relentless fact of social and economic deprivation. Leaving their wives and children in their hometown, they travel across vast distances to assume clerical positions on their own, visiting their families only occasionally on short vacations or other pretenses (such as the gathering of old classmates and close colleagues).

Not all clerics are paid by the local commissions, however. The state has in the past decade engaged in a transformative re-organization in its management of the Hui Islamic clerics by moving the power of economic control gradually away from the local Hui communities and into the hands of the local Islamic associations, regional outposts of the All-China Islamic Association located in Beijing. Nominally a "civil organization" formed on a voluntary basis among China's Muslims, the All-China Islamic Association is nonetheless a thinly veiled state institution designed specifically to co-opt influential religious figures and to render them into "bridges" (*qiaoliang*) that could relay state policies to the general Muslim population (not only Hui) in a language acceptable to both sides. Each province, city and county has its own Islamic association, all integrated into a hierarchical system subject to the centralized control of the All-China Islamic Association in Beijing. Jinbo, secretary of the Henan Provincial Islamic Association, provided a remarkable description of what he thought *yixie* (short for *yisilanjiao xiehui*, "the Islamic association") was, after several rounds of wine without which he might not have been as honest,

> We are in fact an administrative organ (*xingzheng jiguan*) of the state. Our mission is to assist in executing state policies on religion and ethnicity. The government knows that we are part of the state machine, and we know

> it as well. As a matter of fact, the whole world knows it, including the Arabs [note how Jinbo conflates Muslim identity with a monolithic "Arab" identity – a common confusion both among government officials and many ordinary Hui]. But this is merely what you "know," and your knowing it does not change the official nature of *yixie*. We are "in fact" an administrative organ, but we are not defined as one. We function as a bridge and a link between the state and China's Muslims – this is the official definition. You see, the foreigners still do not trust the Communist Party, they don't trust the Chinese state. They have to turn to us, since there is no one else they can turn to. They know we are part of the state machine, but they have to pretend not to know, inasmuch as they still want to have any officially recognized relationship with Muslims in China. I am a member of the Communist Party, and I work for the Communist Party. But I also want to do something for us Muslims.

One thing he had yet to do but which had been done by many of his colleagues elsewhere is to subject all Hui clerics under one's jurisdiction to a uniform economic control by making the local Islamic association the sole institution from which the Hui imams procure their monthly payments. The realization of this plan is enabled by the daily growing bank accounts of the local and the national Islamic associations. In addition to state funding, the countless Islamic associations in China also acquire their income from foreign Muslim donations and the supervision of domestic production and distribution of Halal food products – an increasingly lucrative industry as more Chinese food processing enterprises are looking to the Muslim population as a potentially huge market and trying also to export their merchandises to the Middle East. The administrative re-organization in the governance of Hui clerics receives little financial resistance and is invariably celebrated by the local governments as an important advancement towards building a "good environment" (*lianghao de huanjing*) for the "healthy development" (*jiankang fazhan*) of Islam under the socialist condition. "We are not yet there," Majie, an official in the Guangcheng District Bureau of Religious Affairs in Zhengzhou, told me, "But we'll be there. We are working on that."

An imam funded by the local Islamic association will receive a monthly salary that keeps more closely with the local price level. An eminent and locally influential cleric may receive 2,000 to 3,000 RMB per month, and the amount an entry-level imam receives is considerably higher than the 500 RMB which I mentioned previously. The training of clerics would also undergo critical transformations: instead of depending completely upon *jingtang jiaoyu*, all clerics have to receive some form of training – both religious and secular – in the local Quranic colleges (*jingxueyuan*) organized and funded by the local Islamic associations, whose curriculum includes a considerable portion on the official state policies on religion and ethnicity. All clerics, to be sure, have to acquire a certificate from the state in order to be a legally qualified imam hirable to a mosque commission, and this process of certification existed long before the onset of the administrative re-organization. But what the latter accomplishes is to integrate the Hui clerics into a much more rigorously organized system of management in which both the religious education and the most concrete livelihood of a Hui imam are subject to effective state control. He is not merely watched and surveilled. He is fed and attended to – in fact in a way much better than he ever has been.

An additional dimension makes this state corporatism all the more attractive to many Hui clerics. Since 2010, the State Bureau of Religious Affairs has promulgated a myriad of administrative regulations that attempt to enroll all religious clerics in the state-funded national healthcare and social insurance plan (*shehui baozhang*). The purpose of this enrollment, according to an official document distributed in 2010, is "to clear their [i.e. clerics'] worries about life after retirement and to make sure that they can see a doctor when sick and have a pension to depend on when they are old" (State Bureau of

Religious Affairs, 2010). Although many imams whom I interviewed commended this policy as a significant advancement in the treatment of religious clerics by the Communist Party, the plan itself, however, is not completely funded by the state. A fraction of the total costs nonetheless has to be paid by the clerics themselves. The common way of doing things is to divide the total expense into three parts paid by three different parties: the state budget pays about one third, while the rest is shared between the local commission and the cleric they have hired. An established imam with more wagers in his bargaining with the commission might be able to convince the latter to cover all the remaining costs left unpaid by the state budget, and the commission – especially those who attempt to subject the imams more effectively to their institutionalized control – are also willing to bear these extra expenses, both to show their generosity and to gain an initial upper hand by assuming the role of the "giver." This arrangement binds the Hui clerics materially to the local commissions which hire them and to which they are legally subject in providing religious and ritual services. A consequence of this relationship of economic bondage is that in addition to being limited in their mobility by the state orchestrated household registration system, Hui imams are also bound to the localized mosque commissions in their social insurance and medical benefits. They cannot take their plan with them when they move to a different mosque or assume a position at a different place – it will not be the same commission that continues to pay for his benefits and the procedure for transferring the plan across different locations is dauntingly complicated and time-consuming (especially when the new position is located in a different city or even a different province, in which case the question also emerges as to under which particular municipal or provincial budget should

his benefits be subsumed – the establishment of a national healthcare network unencumbered by local budget segregations has yet to take place [although it is underway at the time of my writing]).

It is in this context that when the local Islamic associations suggest they replace the local mosque commissions in paying for the social and medical benefits of the clerics, the suggestion acquires wide popularity among Hui imams. Special state grants are set aside each year to be distributed to the countless Islamic associations in China specifically for this purpose. In addition to being assured of the continuity of their benefits by the enormous financial power of the wealthy state, the Hui clerics also find another advantage in having the Islamic associations pay for their social insurance and healthcare: placed under the centralized control of the All-China Islamic Association in Beijing, all local Islamic associations are interconnected within the same hierarchical system in the performance of their administrative responsibilities. The trans-local network in which the Islamic associations are situated makes the transference of insurance plans across different locations considerably easier and passes the burden from the individual cleric to the machine of state administration. The plan no longer travels between organizationally independent mosque commissions that are each economically closing in upon itself, but between different local branches of the same state administrative organ. Perhaps incidentally, the trans-local network of the Islamic associations speaks directly to the mobile character of the clerical position, and state corporatism, somewhat paradoxically, solves a critical problem that chains the imams to the commissions that hire them.

To Imam Han, the presiding cleric at Garden Mosque in Zhengzhou, this is a moment of decision that draws a sharp line separating those who are willing “to work with the

state" from those who are not. "A great divergence is underway," said he, "in a decade, you will see the outcome – an internal split among the clerical circle, and an impassible gap between the two sides. Some will become state imams (*guojia ahong*), working for the Communist Party because they depend on it for their livelihood. These people will assume prominent positions and be well fed. Those who choose not to cooperate, on the other hand, will be pushed out of the picture – they might not even be able to obtain the official certificate. Everyone has to make a decision. It's not easy." No black and white answer can be given to this question, and even though Imam Han's tone might sound confrontational and he might have leaned towards the "non-cooperative" side, what we are dealing with is not entirely a question of state oppression or even unilateral political imposition. The state registration of the clerics' names for the purpose of signing them up for social insurance, for instance, has reminded many Hui imams of the worst years of political persecution when names were copied down and violent abuses followed shortly afterwards. But many are nonetheless happy to have their names registered – especially those who have yet to be insured by their commissions. "The Communist Party will not risk doing that again," said Imam Zhu of Down Mosque, who insisted that "now is the best era in decades for the development of Islam in China."

Whether that is true might depend on what kind of "decision" (to use the word of Imam Han) one is willing to make and with what particular perspective one chooses to look at the various state regulations and the mode of institutional relationship between the clerics, the local mosque commissions, the Islamic associations, and the state administration. But the story, as it should have become clear by now, is much more complex and nuanced than either political oppression or state corporatism. The Hui

imams will continue to move around, and the network in which they find their classmates and colleagues will continue to be re-configured by the dense web of relations that materially constitute their lifeworld. And what they do specifically in a particular mosque, even the ritual practices they are often hired to perform, must be seen as inextricably imbricated with these dense relations – recall the critique I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter that imams are "selling out" the Holy Quran in exchange for economic benefits to supplement their meager salary.

Conclusion: Bearing the Unbearable

Xiaodong ("Minor East") Mosque was located right on the side of a busy road at the center of Yinchuan. A grand hotel was under construction just next door, and more magnificent hotels, luxurious restaurants, and shiny night clubs were merely steps away. The rising hotel, even when still unfinished and unadorned, nonetheless overshadowed the small courtyard which enclosed the few low and unassuming houses that constituted Xiaodong Mosque. For a long time, I could not recognize it – a friend of mine told me its exact location and I walked past it countless times in my search, never being able to find it on my own. I thought the courtyard was merely appended to the new hotel, perhaps its backyard left to be filled by trashcans waiting to be vacated by midnight trash collectors – until my friend literally drove me to this place and pointed to me, "See? This is Xiaodong Mosque! How could you not see it? It's right on the side of the road!"

It was a quiet place, at least quiet most of the time, when there were no major rituals such as the annual Eid prayer or the weekly Jumu'ah every Friday at noon. Imam Yang, a man in his mid-40s, was the leading cleric. In addition to conducting funerary rites and

teaching the few students who were residing in the mosque, his obligation also included presiding over small familial rituals in commemorating the deceased and at times accepting the repentance of those who had not been able to observe their daily duties of prayer. “Being an imam is not easy,” he often told me. But he seldom complained. What he did remain constantly unsure of, however, was whether he could at all perform what he was often expected to. In one story he recounted to me, Imam Yang was invited by a few young Hui men to their temporary residence in the suburb of Yinchuan to conduct a ritual called *taobai* (*tawba* in Arabic, “repentance”). “I didn’t realize until I arrived at their home that in fact, they were living with many other young men and women. They lived in poor condition, just to save the expenses. They were all working in the city, perhaps for the same employer. I don’t know.” He paused, and then proceeded,

> I mean, they were practically still kids, boys and girls, some in their teens, others in their early twenties. When I was about to recite the Quranic verses for *taobai*, the older ones who sat closer to me shouted to those standing outside in the courtyard, “Stop talking! Silence! The imam is about to read *taobai*!” I saw the courtyard was filled with people, all kids. Just like that, they all at once fell down on their knees, all of them. Huala— [Yang imitated the sound of a concerted action] I don’t know how to describe that scene. While I was reciting the verses, I could not help thinking, “These kids invite me for *taobai*, because they simply could not perform the daily prayers. They have prepared an expensive meal and give me *jingli* for my service. They want to seek pardon from the merciful Lord, and they need me to intercede so they could be forgiven for the prayers they missed, the fasts they ignored, the sins they committed, and the transgressions they were guilty of.” But,

Imam Yang paused, and turned away to wipe off his tears,

> Can I really do that? Am I able to do that? Oh my Lord, do I have the ability for that? How can I bear such heavy responsibilities? These kids could only depend on me, and they thought my intercession would work. But when the day comes, who will intercede for *me*? And wouldn’t I be punished for having interceded precisely where my intercession simply would not work and would not be accepted? Even if I pray all the time,

> perhaps I will never be able to wash off all the sins thus given to me to shoulder. I am now 46, and maybe it's time to quit. I only have two to three decades left in this world. I need to work for my own salvation. This is just too heavy – it's humanly impossible.

Surely, not all Hui imams have to perform rituals of atonement for migrant workers, but *taobai* is nonetheless a common ritual in the Hui Islamic world. Many ordinary Hui still think that the imam's intercession will be accepted – and they are eager to pay them for this. The efficacy of clerical intercession is framed and thought to be intensified by a monetary exchange – the supposedly unpredictable destiny in the Hereafter is pinned down by encircling the divine in a controllable relationship of exchange, and the imam is seen as the hinge: "I have paid you, and if it doesn't work, it's you who will be punished, not me." The instructions of the clerics are closely followed (when, of course, it is not too much trouble), because – Imam Yang told me – "they think that if they cannot be saved, they have the imams to blame in front of God." Putting the hope of one's salvation on the other is simultaneously to leave oneself an excuse in the face of possible divine punishment. The responsibility is completely transferred to the clerics, and redemption is "outsourced" to their ritual performances especially by those who could not observe the daily prayers and the *Ramaḍān* fasts. Imam Yang was paid for his work, and this payment constituted an important source of income that supported his life as a Hui cleric. He could not refuse to preside over *taobai* and other similar rituals (such as reciting the Quran in order to plead to God for blessings on the dead), for both religious and secular economic reasons. The paradox is that in order for the Hui clerics to sustain the institutional persistence of Hui Islam in the local social world, they are bound to assume this impossible position of bearing the unbearable and performing the unperformable. Perhaps the state orchestrated re-configuration of their economic condition might indeed

in part extricate them from this onerous paradox. Perhaps Hui Islam might indeed undergo a certain “purification” when Hui clerics no longer have to depend upon ritual payment to complement the scanty salary they receive from mosque commissions. But that story still remains to be written, and one is also left wondering if it is at all “humanly possible” to bear the burden of salvation on one’s own shoulder.

Introduction to Part II

CHAPTER 5

Spectres of Socialism, Politics of Ethnicity

The four chapters in Part I examine the various historical, sociological, and political conditions that sustain the social existence of Hui Islam and concretize the imbrication of religion with ethnicity among the Hui. Though the state – whether imperial, republican, or communist – is not absent from these accounts, I have not emphasized the role of the state and have not, for that matter, moved my analytical gaze above the mundane social world of the Hui. Part II, on the other hand, shifts its focus to the state and its more general policies in the governance of ethno-religious difference. In order to clear the ground for the next two chapters (each dealing with a distinct aspect of this governance), I will provide in this transitional chapter a succinct and non-exhaustive historical tracing of the preliminary contours of the socialist politics of ethnicity, focusing particularly upon its intrinsic paradox and the long shadow this specifically socialist paradox casts on the contemporary governance of ethno-religious difference in China.

Since the question of Islam in China is heavily mediated by "the ethnic question" (*minzu wenti*), it is crucial that we pay attention to the particular political publicity accrued to "ethnicity" in the Chinese socialist tradition, and demonstrate why it cannot be reduced to the liberal genealogy of self-determination. Although current debates around

the “ethnic question” in China often pivot on ethno-nationalist “separatism” (*mizu fenlie*) – which already indicates that only certain ethnic groups, in fact, only a small number of them, would be considered worthy of such debates and worthy, therefore, of any attention at all – any proposition of a change of ethnic policies in China necessarily comes up against this socialist legacy, even to the point where a change of ethnic policy might elicit doubts as to the Chinese state’s overt political allegiance to socialism. There seems to be an intrinsic connection between the ethnic question and state socialism, and the spectres of socialism, largely exorcised from the economic domain and daily displaced by an authoritarian financial oligarchy, still loom large in the realm of ethnic affairs. The ethnic question – and the “religious question” which is entwined with it – has almost become *the* site for politics. If the study of other religions (Han Buddhism, Daoism, Catholicism, Protestantism, etc.) can still leave the ethnic question untouched and presume with relative ease that it may still be possible to discuss something called the “religious question,” a study of Islam (and certainly Tibetan Buddhism) in China must confront the complex genealogy of the ethnic question, and the particularly long shadow that the socialist past casts upon it.

Despite the drastic changes China has undergone since 1949, and especially since 1979, the basic political configuration in which the ethnic question is inscribed remains largely intact and the CCP still accounts for its ethnic policy by recourse to the political principles laid down in the 1930s. Absurd and ahistorical this might sound, I nonetheless believe that this particular history still weighs heavily upon the current political purchase of the ethnic question. At least one question needs to be addressed: why does the ethnic question seem to strike such a sensitive cord and appear to be perhaps one of the last

fortresses (together with the "religious question") where a socialist façade can be secured? This chapter attempts at least to offer some inroads in answering this difficult yet critical question. In the same way that a study of contemporary European Islam cannot ignore the still much-alive legacy of colonialism and neocolonialism, and just as it must also take into account the question of immigrant labor and racial discrimination (not to mention gender, which shall be located at a different register altogether), a study of contemporary Islam in China should attend to the convoluted history of the ethnic question.

In the preface to the *Constitution of the People's Republic of China 1954* (hereafter *'54 Constitution*), the first of its kind and later succeeded by three others, the ethnic question, or *minzu wenti*, is presumed to *have already been solved*. Although the Chinese language is not marked by grammatical conjugations that indicate tense, the strong present perfect implication of the article on the ethnic question is nonetheless unmistakable: "All the ethnic groups in our country have already been (*yijing*) united on a free and equal basis into a big family." In spite of the analogy of kinship, this unification is presumed to be neither the result of a cultural homogenization nor the outcome of a top-down statist project of nation-building. It is supposed to have naturally grown out of the anti-imperialist and anti-colonial socialist revolution which also overthrew the rule of the nationalist bourgeoisie acting as comprador class of the Western capitalist powers. The unification does not necessarily presuppose homogenization – at least theoretically – but merely delineates a strategic alliance among subjugated races, nations, and ethnic groups which, with the progression of time, is thought to inevitably give rise to a certain "class consciousness" that prompts the formation of "a big (proletarian) family." The presumption in the *'54 Constitution* that the ethnic question is already solved persists in

all successive constitutions despite countless revisions in other respects. This assumption of finality is constitutive of the socialist attitude to the ethnic question: all the conditions that would induce the structural oppression and marginalization of ethnic minorities in the bourgeois social formation have completely disappeared under the socialist condition, and ethnicity, even though it might continue to exist for a long historical period, would become *politically irrelevant*. The proletarians might still be marked by ethnic distinctions, but they are not grouped and cannot be segmented along ethnic lines. In the imaginary regime of an accomplished socialism, the question of ethnicity is necessarily a survival from the past and cannot be given its specificity outside the hegemonic – and often dogmatic – discourse (not necessarily the actual politics) of class analysis.

The stance taken by the *'54 Constitution* on the ethnic question does not differ substantially from the position of the CCP before the Long March in the 1930s. In the resolution passed during the CCP's Second National Congress in 1922, the ethnic question was framed in the vague idiom of "autonomy (*zizhi*)," and "self-determination (*zijue*)" did not appear in this document. The basic stance of the CCP was summarized thus: "…(3) Unify China Proper (including Manchuria) into a real democratic republic; (4) Acknowledge the right to autonomy of Mongolia, Tibet and Huijiang (i.e. Xinjiang), to the point where they can establish their own democratic autonomous state (*minzu zizhi bang*); (5) Unify China Proper, Mongolia, Tibet and Huijiang into a Federal Republic of China on the basis of free confederation…" (Central Party School, 1991, pp. 18) The verbal ambiguity hinges not only upon the ambivalent meaning of "autonomy," but also on the disputable meaning of *bang*, which I have translated as "state," following the political idiomatic convention in the US (in the sense that New Jersey is a "state" – the

ambiguity of “state” in the American context captures precisely the double meaning of *bang* in this resolution). The ethnic “state” is implicitly confined within the institution of a federal “state,” and their “autonomy” appears to be contained within a “tolerable” limit that deliberately separates it from complete “independence.” The possibility that the new “democratic autonomous states” might prefer not to participate in the new confederation envisioned by the CCP was glossed over in this resolution. One is tempted to surmise that this omission was in part an indication of the still strong grip on the Communists of the desire for preserving China’s territorial integrity, but a closer look provides a slightly different reading.

In general terms, the Communists in the 1920s were highly consistent in their view of the ethnic question. Their avid support for the political struggle of ethnic minorities was certainly not unconditional, but it should nonetheless be carefully distinguished from the reserved position of the Nationalist KMT (the nationalist party established by Sun Yat-sen and later controlled by Chiang Kai-shek). If a certain Sino-centric nationalism was hegemonic among the latter, it was a clearly delineated Communist strategic concern that underwrote the decisions and propaganda of the former. Framed either in terms of “autonomy” or “self-determination,” the political support of the CCP was based upon and constantly returned to a classically Marxist-Leninist class analysis: the revolutionary significance of the political struggle of ethnic minorities must presuppose the preliminary condition that these struggles are under the sole leadership of and reliant upon the independent organizational forces of the ethnic proletarians. This principal judgment should be situated in a larger strategic field in which the Communists were trying to make their tactical intervention.

First, although the Communists, following the instruction of the Third International, considered the Chinese anti-imperialist struggle in this period as a bourgeois democratic revolution by definition, the particularity of the world situation and the specificity of the Chinese social formation – its forced insertion into the world capitalist market, a weak national capitalism, and the socially determined political untrustworthiness of the Chinese big landed property and the new comprador bourgeois – prompted them to make a key strategic assessment which followed closely the orthodox Leninist position sharpened by the triumph of the October Revolution: that the complete success of the bourgeois democratic revolution and the accomplishment of full national independence must depend upon the power of a social group that possesses the most unreserved revolutionary force and occupies the most uncompromising – as socially determined and structurally defined – position in relation to the aggressive Western imperialism. It followed from this judgment that it was the proletarians, and the proletarians alone, who could accomplish what the national bourgeois attempted to but necessarily could not accomplish. The bourgeois democratic revolution was in this context necessarily transformed by the socialist revolution: the latter did not follow from the success of the former (i.e. the "stages of revolution" thesis). To the contrary, it created the conditions for the realization of the former and meanwhile canceled the conditions for the continual existence of the bourgeois as a class. In this revolutionary scheme, it was only the triumph of the socialist revolution that would both realize the political interest of the bourgeois and with the same stroke foreclose the possibility for the formation of the class hegemony of the bourgeois (which had never existed in the first place). The moment that the interest of the bourgeoisie was realized *for them* and *by the proletarians* was also the

moment that they resigned from the historical stage and passed into obsolescence. This strategic assessment of the CCP therefore crystalized into an either/or decision: either the bourgeois democratic revolution and the struggle for national independence necessarily failed under the intrinsically concessionary leadership of the national bourgeois represented by the KMT, or one turned to an apparently more radical socialist revolution which was in fact more urgently called for by the sociological necessity that inhered in the particular revolutionary situation in China. This position was succinctly summarized in the resolution on the national revolution passed on the CCP's Fourth National Congress in 1924,

> Contemporary national liberation movements are different from the archaic, vague, and generally xenophobic national revolutions. The national liberation movements among the oppressed nations are intimately linked to the class liberation struggles within the oppressed countries. Therefore, the solitary statist nationalism is no longer suitable for contemporary national liberation movements. The oppressing classes in each country also utilize the force of the workers and the peasants in their own struggles, but when push comes to shove, they always betray the proletarians and surrender to the enemies, obstructing the ultimate success of national liberation. Hence, it is only the active participation of the proletarians in the national liberation that could prevent the formation of reactionary compromise, and the development of the forces of national liberation is directly proportional to the development of the class struggle and the strengthening of the power of the working classes.
>
> (Ibid., pp. 32)

This is one point where the position of the Chinese Communists in the 1920s came closer to Trotskyism (the "permanent revolution" thesis) than Stalinism which reigned supreme in the Comintern of this period.[39] That the "oppressing classes" (both the big landed property and the national and comprador bourgeois) would necessarily betray the proletarians who were deceived into forging an alliance with the former in the democratic

[39] For the vicissitudes of Trotskyism in China, see Peng, 1990, 1974; Benton, 1996; Miller, 1979.

revolution was an appraisal not unfamiliar in the Marxian tradition. The lesson of the *Eighteen Brumaire* was readily brought into discussion on the Chinese revolution in the work of Trotsky in the 1920s and early 1930s, embodied in a series of scathing critiques he waged against the Stalinist position which, according to Trotsky, practically annulled the independent organizational status of the CCP and assimilated the force of the proletarians into the party of the national and comprador bourgeois (the KMT) (Trotsky, Evans, & Block, 1976; Trotsky & Shachtman, 1967). The above quote is retrieved from the Fourth National Congress of the CCP in 1924, which was also the occasion when the official decision was made – certainly under the threat of "discipline" brandished by the Comintern representative working among the Chinese Communists – to collaborate with the Nationalist KMT by having Communists join the KMT on an individual basis. What happened subsequently was self-censorship on the Communist side and a decline in the class struggle of the urban proletarians, self-imposed by the CCP to maintain the precarious collaboration with the KMT under the command of the Stalinist Comintern. In other words, although the 1924 resolution insisted strongly that the success of contemporary national liberation movement depend primarily upon the strength of the independent organization of the proletarians, what happened in fact was precisely the contrary: that under the command of the Stalinist Comintern, the Communists were set on a path to progressively losing their independent organizational power and giving in to the bourgeois KMT. This progressive debilitation of the Communist organization culminated in the 1927 *coup* carried out by Chiang Kai-shek, which dealt a devastating blow to the Communist movement and compelled the CCP to a hasty military uprising in the same year.

Second, and parallel to the assessment that the ultimate triumph of the democratic revolution must presuppose and actively accelerate the intensification of class struggle within the Chinese society, the CCP's support for the autonomy and self-determination of China's ethnic minorities followed the same line of strategic reasoning. The year 1924 was again critical in this respect: the Mongolian People's Republic was officially declared in this year under the leadership of the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party (the Mongolian communist party) with close collaboration with the Soviet Union and the Comintern. The CCP was particularly supportive of this new political arrangement, despite the fact that Mongolia (or "outer Mongolia" in the conventional China-centered political idiom of the time – ironically, the word "inner Mongolia" is still under official use to designate the part of Mongolia that continues to remain within the boundary of the contemporary People's Republic of China) partially seceded from China and declared its nominal independence shortly after the fall of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911 A.D.). On the one hand, the nationalist KMT – this was at a time when it just started its collaboration with the Communists under the moderation of the Comintern – constantly vacillated between its acknowledgement of the right to self-determination of China's ethnic minorities, officially proclaimed – as a result of the compromise struck with the CCP and the Comintern – in the resolution reached on its First National Congress in 1924, and its strong nationalistic desire to keep intact the vast territory of China passed off by the Qing Dynasty. On the other and compared to this ambivalent position, the stance of the CCP was much more unequivocal, and their unwavering support derived from two interlinked strategic concerns: first, the independent Mongolian People's Republic was a socialist state where the proletarians and the peasants had supposedly conquered state

power, and their secession from China and alliance with the Soviet Union would strengthen the power of the international Communist movement. Seen in this strategic light, the separation of the "outer" Mongolia worked precisely in favor of the socialist revolution within China, and was conducive to the development of class struggle and by extension the democratic national independence of the Chinese people. According to the Chinese Communists of this period, an independent socialist state would by definition be an unfailing ally of their own struggles. Second – and directly corresponding to the first point – the establishment of the Mongolian People's Republic was thought to necessarily undermine the power of China's national bourgeois and "feudal forces," especially the big landed proprietors whose political representatives were thought to be the militant warlords. The secession of Mongolia was supposed to deprive the warlords of a vast territory for the extraction of natural resources and contract the segmented space in which they strove to establish their own personal kingdoms. Situating their maneuvering squarely in the field of international Communism that transformed the political significance of any and every local struggle, the Communists did not think in nationalistic terms. They were *indifferent* to the (bourgeois) nationalistic cause upheld by the KMT, and harbored a transnational political vision which was again closer to Trotsky's version of Communism as an intrinsically international project that must not base itself off the conviction that socialism should depart from establishing itself in a particular country as the "first step" towards internationalization.

It is against this general background that we shall understand the Communists' political vision of a free confederation with "democratic autonomous states" established by ethnic minorities in an imaginary future. In the words of Qu Qiubai, the General

Secretariat of the CCP during 1927-1928, “only after the political rule of the bourgeois is completely overthrown can the condition for the free association of all nationalities obtain,” and “the dictatorship of the proletarians is the sole guarantee for the happiness and freedom of all nationalities” (Central Party School, 1991, pp. 63). The ethnic question is posed in this dual proposition as a fundamentally marginal question: insofar as the class struggle reaches its teleological end in its historical progression towards Communism, the ethnic question will correlatively *solve itself*. Whether there would ultimately emerge a new Federal Republic of China does not matter significantly in this political imaginary; in fact, if all of China’s ethnic minorities could accomplish the dictatorship of the proletariats in their own “state” and realize the socialist revolution in their own class struggle, the strategic need to strengthen the power of the socialist camp would inevitably induce the formation of such a confederation. It was ultimately *irrelevant* whether a federal state or a loose multi-ethnic union would appear among the future socialist states – socialism was in principle and by definition an international enterprise, and “socialist state” was *de jure* a contradiction in term. The ethnic question was in this way completely reduced to the class question.

This in part explains why before the mid-1930s the Chinese Communists were exempt from the necessarily inconclusive debate on what constituted a “nation” and how one should distill the core characteristics that could distinguish a nationality from all others. There has been a tremendous amount of work on this multifarious and enormously influential debate (whose influence still looms large in the surge of [Han] nationalism in contemporary China), and I would not recapitulate the vast amount of historical, anthropological, and archeological narratives produced therein. What I am interested in

here is the particular register at which the early Chinese Communists located the specificity (or the lack thereof) of the ethnic question in the whole socialist revolutionary scheme. The kind of self-determination they supported among the ethnic minorities always presupposed an irreducible class struggle among the latter, and this presupposition secured beforehand that the seceded and independent ethnic "states" – the "socialist" ethnic states – were necessarily allies of the Communists of "China Proper." A sequel to this Communist position is that the Chinese Han proletarians must actively assist the ethnic proletarians and peasants in overthrowing the rule of their own nobilities, landlords, or religious priests (e.g. lamas in Tibet). It was presumed by the Communists that only when the movements of self-determination among the ethnic minorities were led primarily by the ethnic proletarians that the independence eventually accomplished could be seen as an "authentic" emancipation. If the ethnic proletarians could not assume the responsibility that history had given them, a trans-ethnic alliance with the Han proletarians was not merely preferable or optional, but strongly demanded by theoretically projected historical necessity (Ibid., pp. 103, 113-114).

This Communist narrative follows closely the Leninist instruction adopted by the Soviet Union in its own attitude to the ethno-national minorities included in its confederated republics. It amounts to a redundant platitude to state that the Chinese Communists, owing both to their acceptance of Leninism as the fundamental principle of organization and to their disciplinary submission to the Comintern in the international Communist movement, based their position regarding China's ethnic minorities directly off the Soviet experience in contradistinction to the liberal (bourgeois) tradition of self-determination. But this cliché misses a critical paradox – perhaps even an irony – that

inheres in this position which would later haunt any proposed solution to the ethnic question under the (post)socialist condition. The point is not merely that by acknowledging the right to self-determination/autonomy of ethnic minorities, the Leninist approach would almost unexceptionally – in the former Soviet Union and in China – backfire and intensify ethno-national consciousness instead of producing the condition under which it might gradually abate and disappear into class consciousness. What perhaps deserves more analytical attention and is particularly important for my discussion in this dissertation is another irony: that the Chinese Communists were so forthright and unreserved in their avid support for the self-determination of China's ethnic minorities – to the point where they explicitly celebrated the secession of "outer" Mongolia – primarily because for them, the ethnic question was *irrelevant*. It was precisely because it *did not matter* as a fundamental question that it could be given such overt political publicity and made the site for the most resolute and unfaltering pronouncement. Paradoxically, the marginal question, because of its peripherality in the Communist vision, was given a political visibility perhaps unrivaled by its place in the liberal tradition. It was made into a political question because it did not matter to Communist politics; it was given the particular power to mark the radicality of the Chinese Communist movement and to distinguish the Communists from the "hypocritical" KMT only because it was presumed that the ethnic question would necessarily be solved when the class struggle reached its teleological endpoint. What we read in the *'54 Constitution* is only a revamp *mutatis mutandis* – surely in a completely different political context – of this old presumption: it is because the ethnic question was supposed to *have already been solved* that it was and continues to be attributed a particularly intense and necessarily

spectral (because it is theoretically presumed that in the "actually existing socialism," the politics of ethnicity is necessarily devoid of substance) political publicity. It was passionately offered to the gaze of the politically minded because it was presumed that fundamentally there was nothing to be seen.

This vital point has to be complemented by another inflection in the CCP's position on the ethnic question after the mid-1930s. This inflection was derived primarily from the Communist experience during the Long March, which crossed both Southwest and Northwest China where an enormous amount and variety of China's ethnic minorities concentrated. In this introduction which serves only to clear the ground for subsequent chapters, I can only provide a schematic account of the basic political and military conditions that prompted this inflection and the critical ideological work conducted by the CCP (especially the intervention of Mao Zedong) in relation to this inflection. This account does not mean to be exhaustive, but merely intends to offer a general historical background to situate the spectral politics of ethnicity in contemporary China.

Two basic conditions foregrounded the Long March of the Communist Red Army in mid-1930s. First, although the area they traversed were far away from the central authority of the KMT and the ethnic minorities they came across were mostly illiterate both in the Chinese language and in the political policies of the Nationalist state, the KMT propaganda had nonetheless reached far deep into the rugged mountains in Southwest and Northwest China. The Red Army was portrayed in this propaganda as aggressive and demonic bandits who looted the relatively rich and confiscated properties by sheer force. Some ethnic minorities, upon knowing that the Red Army was approaching their villages, would immediately set their livestock roaming in the

mountain, hide their grain crops between the walls of their abode (a secret soon to be discovered at their peril by the starving soldiers of the Red Army), and avoid by all means any contact with the Communists (Ibid., pp. 292-5). Second, the Long March, although marked in the history of the CCP as the turning point of the Chinese socialist revolution, was in effect only a narrow escape from the clutch of the KMT military force equipped with much advanced weaponry. The military failure of the Red Army was aggravated by perhaps the most concrete problem of all long-term military operations – logistics, especially as they were moving away from the fertile Eastern China into the barren hinterland. Between 1927 and the Long March in mid-1930s, the major source of income for the Red Army was the confiscated properties (excluding land, which was often distributed to the poor and middle peasants) of the rich landlords and local gentries. Land reform was not merely a political program that characterized the Communist movement, but also, and more practically, a way to fund the lasting military confrontation of the CCP with the KMT government.

This dual condition, together with the urgent need to alleviate the antagonism of ethnic minorities – especially the upper classes who still commanded the submission and loyalty of their own ethnic groups (e.g. lamas among the ordinary Tibetans, princes and nobilities among the Mongolians) – long cultivated by the KMT propaganda, entailed a particularly tense and demanding situation for the gasping Red Army: on the one hand, the soldiers were starving and eager to resort to the old method, i.e. violent land reform, to ease hunger and fund their military operation. The straightforwardness of this method and the quick return it could generate rendered it particularly attractive in a situation where basic sustenance had become a major problem. The utter strangeness of the “exotic”

ethnic minorities to the Communist soldiers – a majority of whom came from Eastern and Southeastern China – and the almost impassable linguistic barrier only made the minorities more vulnerable to the Red Army predators (Ibid., pp. 436-440). Many "land reforms" – perhaps unabashed robbery might be a more appropriate word – happened without or against the command of higher military authorities in the Red Army. A short telegram dated July 1935 and buried in the vast archive of the Communist documents of this period might give us a rough idea of what was happening,

> To the political departments of all regiments,
>
> In order to strengthen the discipline of the troops and polish our image in the eyes of the masses – especially the ethnic minorities – in the southwest, it is strictly prohibited that individual companies carry out land reform and confiscate the properties of landlords in the course of their march. The acquirement of food and other logistical materials should be centrally organized and controlled by the authority at the regiment-level, and placed under the leadership of the local party committees. The companies could still conduct investigations of local landlords, but they must not confiscate their properties without the order issued by higher authority.
>
> (Ibid., pp. 343, cf. 423)

On the other hand, as this telegram already reveals, it was precisely at the time when the ordinary soldiers were in dire need of the arbitrary confiscation of food and other properties for their basic survival that the Central Committee of the CCP began to change their previous policy and became highly cautious as to the possible outcome of conducting "land reform" among ethnic minorities (Ibid., pp. 360, 394). Perhaps unsurprisingly, the consequence of observing Han soldiers robbing ethnic landlords was not so much the wake-up of ethnic peasants and pastoralists to their own class consciousness as the simmering of anti-Han ethno-national sentiments. It soon became clear to the Communists that ethnic elites – lamas (among the Tibetans and Mongolians), *tusi*s (nobilities among many different southwestern ethnic minorities, but primarily

among the "Yi"), *akhongs* (imams among Hui Muslims), and even ethnic warlords (e.g. the multitude of Hui warlords in Northwest China), all of whom being the major targets for "land reform" – still commanded a strong loyalty among their own ethnic group. The force of the discontent in regard to exploitative tenancy and financial usury, even the resentment owing to the prevalence of oppression and slavery among some groups, was far weaker compared to the affective power commanded by ethnic identity – or so in the eyes of the Chinese Communists. Although the Communist propaganda of minorities' right to self-determination presupposed that the genuine self-determination could not be established without the full realization of the proletarian dictatorship, this propaganda itself could not escape an important irony: those to which it was directed – the "oppressed masses" among the ethnic minorities – were hardly concerned with the abstract concept of self-determination, and many were illiterate and could not understand the slogans often chalked on the walls of their houses by the passing Communist soldiers. It was to the contrary the ethnic elites, the presumed "enemies" of the Red Army, who were most interested in the political possibilities afforded by this vague term. It appeared that the CCP was caught between a rock and a hard place: either they continued to provoke the ethnic oppressed classes and conduct relentless land reform to fund their military operation – which, according to their evaluation of the situation, would almost inevitably fail and put the Red Army in a more difficult position, or they set out on a different path and started to probe the possibility of a conditional collaboration with ethnic elites, a collaboration that would require a virtuoso strategist and tactician who would be able to maneuver over this necessarily unstable ground. Previously, the CCP could assume in a purely theoretical manner that the future "socialist states" established by the triumphant

ethnic proletarians would necessarily be their allies, although this alliance was deferred to an indefinite future (this specific temporal dimension was a key character of this teleological political vision). Now, the coalition was re-located to the present moment, with the only – and critical – difference that it was founded upon uncertain compromises and insincere commitments, because the ally had become the inherently untrustworthy ethnic elites. The *theoretical certainty* of class analysis gave way to the *practical unpredictability* of coalitional politics. This is the basic shift in the socialist strategy of the CCP in this turning historical period.

The political coalition with the ethnic elites was dubbed the "United Front with the upper classes (*shangceng tongyizhanxian*)," in contradistinction to the more classical Bolshevik position in forging alliances exclusively with the ethnic proletarians and oppressed masses. As a consequence of this strategic shift, the CCP transformed its actual tactics on the ground: it issued a multitude of orders to painstakingly curb the tendency among the ordinary Red Army soldiers to continue with the old policy of land reform and arbitrary confiscation previously executed in Eastern China among the Han. In a working report submitted for intraparty general circulation in 1937 by the CCP's Committee on the Work among Ethnic Minorities, it was explicitly proposed, without any conditional qualifier, that "our Red Army is strongly opposed to confiscating the properties of the Hui landlords and gentries" (Ibid., pp. 569).

The effects – and the confusion – entailed by this historical turn were unevenly distributed among the upper echelon of the CCP and the ordinary party cadres who remained responsible for the daily work on the political frontline. The link between Communism and the Communist Party, on the one hand, and the violent and arbitrary

confiscation of the locally rich and powerful, on the other, was irretrievably reified at the ground level in the course of actual political work. For those even less careful – especially the ordinary Red Army soldiers, many of whom were recruited from among the downtrodden poor peasants considered "natural allies" of the numerically weak Chinese proletarians – confiscation and robbery were made to stand in for Communism in general. Communism was seen as synonymous with the looting of the rich; the question "What else could/should the Communist Party do except for looting the landlords and the gentries? (*gongchandang buda tuhao hai gan shenme?*)" was frequently posed among the fighters and the propagandists as a response to the increasingly strict ban (especially as the Second Sino-Japanese War was approaching) on looting the ethnic rich issued by the higher authority. (Ibid., pp. 523) The extent of this reification may in part be gauged by a somewhat farcical scenario (which involves, interestingly, the question of translation) described in a report on the work among the Mongolians filed in July 1936 by a veteran CCP cadre,

> We shall promote the political education among our cadres – especially the translators – that were involved in the work among ethnic minorities. For instance, we once talked to a Mongolian Lama in the course of our work, and the translator who worked with us reduced the many important political questions we addressed to the simple principle he summarized as that of "looting the locally rich and saving the poor people (*da tuhao jiu qiongren*)." He was not able to translate all the rest. We were practically fuming.
>
> (Ibid., pp. 513)

The tenacity of this reification of the CCP's position made it particularly difficult for it to convince both its own army of cadres and soldiers and its proposed allies – i.e. the ethnic elites – that the new policy was completely consistent with its old and more radical stance. With the onset of the Second Sino-Japanese War in mid-1930s (the official event that

marked its inception took place in 1937, but the war long preceded this date), the urgency of consolidating the leadership of the upper echelon of the CCP became particularly critical. The Leninist Bolshevik principle of strict discipline as the organizational guarantee for the ultimate triumph of the Communist cause required a more rigorous ideological re-alignment, in addition to a more robust mechanism in rooting out direct disobedience for the pursuit of petty self-interest (e.g. the embezzlement in land reform). More particularly, a strong positive reason must be provided to buttress the fundamental strategic shift from portraying the ethnic elites as the main target for violent confiscation to treating them as the major coalitional force that should be courted even at the expense of the ethnic "oppressed masses." The expedient proposition which argued that this concession was required by the passive military survival of the Red Army did not possess sufficient persuasive power, since many lower cadres and ordinary soldiers were practically starving as a result of this shift. A new ideological justification – one that would turn a "compromise" into a "necessity" – was therefore urgently needed among the CCP higher authority during this period.

This particular demand was met by a general ideological re-alignment in which the ethnic question in fact figured much less prominently compared to other more burning issues of the day. The paramount concern of the CCP between 1937 and 1945 – the entire duration of the Second Sino-Japanese War – was to maintain an intrinsically unstable collaboration with the KMT in resisting the imperialist invasion of the Japanese forces. But the forging of this "Anti-Japanese National United Front (*kangri minzu tongyizhanxian*)," as this collaboration was named by the CCP, was from the beginning haunted by the memory of the blood-drenched failure of the recent past: the memory of

the 1927 *coup* of Chiang Kai-shek, which ended in particularly violent terms the first CCP-KMT collaboration, still evoked among many CCP members a strong suspicion of the KMT. This suspicion was cast in the idiom of a set of strongly Trotskyist questions that cut deeply into the center of the Chinese Communist Movement: was this new collaboration merely a repetition of the previous mistake? Did it demand, just like last time, forfeiting (either officially or as an unintended but inevitable consequence) the independent status of the Chinese proletarians as a compromise necessitated by the coalition with the national and comprador bourgeois represented by the KMT? In what way was this new collaboration different and how could it be verified that it would not tread the same path as the first collaboration did?

It is in this political space that I think we should locate the ideological intervention of Mao Zedong and his followers. The very first point to note is that this intervention was situated in and constantly resorted to a fundamental shift in the political and military status of the CCP: still a weak political party in the 1920s struggling to develop its fledgling organization among the urban proletarians with neither an independent military force nor the support of the vast reserve of the peasants, the CCP in the 1930s, on the other hand, possessed a much stronger base upon which they could build and sustain their organizational independence. It is certainly true that the number of the CCP troops had considerably dwindled due to the difficulty they had to endure in the onerous Long March, but this temporary military frustration only reinforced the CCP's conviction that they must by all means maintain their independent organizational status in any future cooperation with the KMT, or any other political force for that matter. The dispute around the second CCP-KMT collaboration – i.e. the formation of the Anti-Japanese

National United Front – hinged precisely upon whether and how this independence could be secured, and what conditions could prevent it from replicating the political destiny of the first. In a speech on November 5, 1938, delivered precisely on the question of the CCP's independent status in the new United Front, Mao laid out in clear terms the gist of his intervention,

> We should use long-term collaboration [with the KMT] to support the lasting war [with the Japanese], which means, more specifically, that the class struggle should be made to serve the interest of the anti-Japanese national struggle. This is the fundamental criterion of the United Front. Under this general criterion, it was a necessity that we must maintain the independence of our party and the class perspective within this United Front, without sacrificing it for the sake of collaboration and unification [with the KMT]. This critical independence is conducive to the collaboration; it in fact defines this collaboration. The loss of it means assimilation [into the KMT] and would inevitably destroy the United Front. Under the present circumstance, the class struggle manifests itself through the the national struggle, and this points to their consistency.
>
> (Ibid., pp. 607)

The last sentence in this quote was particularly critical, but it was – perhaps intentionally – extremely ambiguous. We shall note that Mao wrote *On Contradiction* one year before this speech, and it was written precisely at the time when the Second Sino-Japanese War openly broke out at full scale.[40] The distinction between "major contradiction" and "minor contradiction," for instance, was addressed specifically to this vital transformation in the historical juncture, and was proposed as a theoretical practice – in the sense that Althusser gives to this term – to reformulate the historically situated relationship between the class struggle and the national liberation movement in China in the 1930s. The concept of "manifestation" was especially intriguing. A different topological relationship

[40] I am not engaging the dispute as to whether *On Contradiction* and other key Maoist texts are indeed written by Mao himself or by other Chinese Marxist philosophers. For these debates, see Knight, 2007, 2005.

between the class struggle and the national revolution seemed to be implicated in the mediatory logic inferred by this word: that the phenomenality of the class struggle, because of the objective shift in the historical juncture, was necessarily mediated by the national revolutionary struggle; that the class struggle, in other words, was strictly speaking *overdetermined* by the national revolution. In another speech Mao delivered in the same year, the critical significance of the national revolution for the class struggle (instead of the other way around) was again proposed, and this time, in a more overt and unambiguous manner:

> The CCP members must reconcile patriotism with internationalism. We are patriots as well as internationalists. We fight for our motherland against invaders….Only after national liberation can the possibility obtain for the emancipation of the proletarians and the laboring masses. If China wins [the war against imperialism] and defeats the imperialists, this would necessarily help the oppressed masses of other countries. Therefore, patriotism is the realization of internationalism in the national liberation….All the patriotic acts on our side are justified, and all are the realization of internationalism specifically in the Chinese context. Not a bit of them is against internationalism. Only political imbeciles or provocateurs would accuse us of repudiating the international line.
>
> (Ibid., pp. 599)

Since what I intend to do in this section of the introduction is to situate the general political space in which the ethnic question was addressed and debated among the Chinese Communists, I would not digress into a more detailed discussion of the political purges, ideological infighting, and power struggles within the upper echelon of the CCP. Mao's critique of "political imbeciles," especially his designation of his opponents as "provocateurs," strongly implied the insertion of his ideological work on the United Front into the concrete political gaming he was then engaging with Chen Shaoyu ("Wang Ming") who was soon to be disgraced and named as a major "ultra-leftist" on whom

many defeats of the CCP was blamed. But it is not this political power struggle – on which has been spilled quite a lot of ink – that I am interested in.[41] What I find rather more critical is the particular structure of the argument that Mao put forth. Patriotism was not portrayed as contradictory to internationalism; it was construed neither as an expedient concession to the historical juncture nor as a necessary step that would eventually be overcome by internationalism. To the contrary, a different form of temporality was propounded: internationalism was not postponed to an indefinite future. It was *already realized* in and by an apparently provincial patriotism. This means that the exclusive focus upon China's own war with the Japanese and the political collaboration with the KMT (with conditional compromises the CCP Central Committee publicly reckoned with), both required by the United Front, were *always already* internationalism in the Maoist formulation. It was precisely because of this that Mao could take perhaps the ultimate step in declaring that "the line of the United Front *is* the class line;" that the United Front was not a compromise (although "local" compromises were certainly involved) but an intrinsic necessity to the eventual triumph of the class struggle.

This Maoist position killed two birds with one stone and completely transformed the ideological field in which the CCP maneuvered: on the one hand, the national revolution was not understood to be the "first step" towards internationalization. Mao's stance, strictly speaking, could not be subsumed under the "stage theory" which was the Stalinist position in the 1920s and 1930s. On the other, this Maoist position was equally different from the classical Trotskyist stance committed to a radical internationalist vision (Trotsky's critique of Stalin's international policy in the 1920s hinged precisely upon the

[41] See Gao, 2000 for a detailed historiographical study of the fierce power struggles in the upper echelon of the CCP during this period.

latter's efforts at protecting the particular state interests of the Soviet Union in the world communist movement). Mao differed from Trotsky – in fact, the 1930s witnessed one of the most violent suppressions of the Trotskyites among the CCP (the "provocateurs" certainly included the Trotskyites) – in the sense that he established a completely different mode of relationship between nationalism (what he called "patriotism") and internationalism. If Trotsky was committed to a more literal Communist internationalism, i.e. the unrelenting position that insisted on cultivating transnational coalitions with world proletarians without giving in to parochial national interests, Mao's internationalism amounted almost to a complete reversal of Trotsky's (and the early CCP's) position. Nationalism was re-conceptualized as the *manifestation* and *realization* – or perhaps the *mediation* – of internationalism in the particular historical juncture that was China in the 1930s and 1940s. In this new light, the United Front and the coalition with the national and comprador bourgeois were *theoretically* assimilated into the Communist strategy. In a certain sense, and surely with much political and conceptual difference, what Mao did in the 1930s may be comparable to what Althusser did among the PCF (the French Communist Party) in the 1960s before the onset of 1968.

It is in relation to this general conceptual shift in the Communist strategy that I want to situate the change of the CCP's ethnic policy after the Long March and especially during the Second Sino-Japanese War. The "Upper Class United Front" the CCP painstakingly sought with the ethnic elites fit tightly into this general strategic shift. What was a practical impossibility – that it was extremely difficult, if at all possible, to lead the ethnic oppressed masses into a self-conscious land reform against their own upper classes, hence overriding their ethnic identity with a strong class consciousness – now became a

theoretically grounded strategic choice: a coalition with the ethnic elites was no longer a temporary and passive compromise to conserve the decrepit Red Army. It became a necessity that was required by the class politics itself – it *was* class politics. To paraphrase Mao, "the line of Upper Class United Front *is* the class line." By means of the Maoist intervention, the class politics was not eradicated. It was transformed and re-situated, with the ethnic question reformulated accordingly.

To be sure, in neither of the two historical periods that I have discussed in this section (before the Long March and after 1949 on the one hand, and between the Long March and mid-1940s on the other) did the ethnic question take center stage. But as I have demonstrated above, it was marginal in irreducibly different – at times inverse – ways across these two historical epochs. The account I have given is definitely non-exhaustive. But these at times fragmented historical scenarios serve only to demonstrate why I consider it critical not to reduce the itinerary of the ethnic question in the (post)socialist China to a liberal genealogy of self-determination, which perhaps has become the hegemonic political imaginary in theorizing and analyzing the politics of ethnicity after the Second World War and the decolonization movements.

However, my intention to displace the dominant liberal imaginary on the politics of ethnicity with a socialist past that still looms large in contemporary China is necessarily limited by the partiality and exclusivity that mark this history from the outset. Despite (or precisely because of) the fact that I paint the picture in quite broad strokes, the limit of my attempt becomes acutely visible even with a brief look at the particular level at which the history I recount unfolds. The "ethnic elites" which Mao included in the "Upper Class United Front" were almost exclusively from four ethnic groups: the Hui, the Mongols,

the Tibetans, and the so-called "Yi." Uyghur elites were added to the laundry list in the 1950s, for a brief time before Xinjiang was violently placed under the ruthless rule of the CCP. The Red Army certainly encountered many more ethnic groups in the Long March – some they might have heard of, while others were simply unbeknown to them – but not all mattered, and only a selected few were given the "privilege" to inhabit the marginal and insignificant political position assigned to them in the "Upper Class United Front." In other words, it must be registered and given due attention that the potential theoretical and political insight that might be gained from excavating the socialist politics of ethnicity as an alternative to the hegemonic liberal imaginary necessarily presupposes an exclusion from this tradition of those ethnic minorities who simply did not and perhaps could not appear in this story. The site of those who have been excluded even from inhabiting the marginal position instituted by the socialist politics of ethnicity must remain indelible.

Part II

CHAPTER 6

In the Name of Autonomy, or, Does "the Ethnic Question" Exist?

Haiyuan is a small county in southern Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region. In the ecological terms now often used to refer to this area, Haiyuan is located within the "southern mountainous region" (*nanbu shanqu*), a phrase that immediately conjures the rural-urban division in China, with all the connotations of poverty, migrant labor, and environmental vulnerability. According to various Chinese reports, Haiyuan, together with Xiji and Guyuan, was listed by the United Nations Development Program in 1972 as one of the areas in the world deemed "unsuitable for human survival." Its low precipitation rate and coarse soil have rendered making a living unbearably difficult. The conditions have earned Haiyuan the designation of a state-level poverty-stricken county (*guojiaji pinkunxian*) eligible for national relief funds. Around 69% of the population is Hui, which makes Haiyuan one of the few places in the entire Hui Autonomous Region where the minority actually constitutes a majority.

In 2009, news of a new round of administrative delimitation started to spread among the local people, and this time, it was in the name of poverty reduction. To those in

positions within government bureaucracy, the determination of devastating poverty can be a double-edged sword. The county governments are the lowest level at which local governance can be effectively administered, and poverty renders them eligible for state funding and preferential policies, often rich soil for embezzlement. Stories abound of how neighboring counties compete to make the life of local population appear miserable so as to be labeled by the state as a poverty-stricken county. Misery, real or fake – but of course never fake for the really poor who in turn will have to bear the all-too-real cost of faking – is turned into capital, a basis on which grows the misappropriation of local officials. However, there is also a flip side to the story: being funded is certainly a good thing, but one must be careful not to play the card too often or too much. Poverty can attract government investment, but it can also be an apparent statement of administrative incompetence and the incapacity to develop the local economy. In a bureaucracy driven primarily by the pursuit of ever higher GDP figures, continuing local poverty could easily jeopardize the career of local officials thirsty for promotion. Different approaches for alleviating poverty (or at the very least the *appearance* of it) are often tried out, and administrative re-demarcation is one particularly attractive option.

As part of the "southern mountainous region," Haiyuan is notorious for its poverty. The very name "southern mountainous region" alludes to extreme poverty and intolerable livelihood. It's a term that sticks in the mind of all those who know Ningxia. In other words – and this is the administrative sleight of hand at stake – if poverty is so intimately tied to a local name, the relief of poverty likewise does not necessarily have to work with concrete numbers (which in themselves are manipulable names). As long as Haiyuan is no longer considered part of the "southern mountainous region," and as long as there still

remain places which are, a change of administrative boundary could change the political situation. On the one hand, such a change could easily free Haiyuan from its disrepute. On the other, it could further appear to reduce the size of the "southern mountainous region." This is exactly what was accomplished in 2009: Haiyuan was cut from its previous administrative connection with the city of Guyuan and subject to the jurisdiction of Zhongwei, a city in the middle of Ningxia with a name of agricultural prosperity. Compared to the "southern mountainous region," the northern plain of Ningxia is widely considered to be the fertile Yangtze delta in northwest China.

But Zhongwei is not yet "the north," which centers upon Yinchuan, the capital city of Ningxia. Zhongwei is located in what has been called the "middle arid area" (*zhongbu ganhandai*), between the northern plain and the southern mountains. Furthermore, it is also in the middle in terms of the ratio of Hui population. Lower than the 69% of Haiyuan county but higher than the 23% of the capital Yinchuan, Zhongwei has a Hui population of 35%.

A change of name brings more than a nominal change of administrative status. In addition to no longer being considered part of the notoriously poor "southern mountainous region," Haiyuan also expanded. The city of Zhongwei redrew its internal borders and transferred two townships to the newly appended Haiyuan. The crucial point is, that in contrast to the predominantly crevasse-laden landscape of Haiyuan, the two new towns are fertile plains. Eventually given an opportunity to move outside the bleak mountains, officials of Haiyuan drooled over the newly appended towns and even planned to move the county seat from the trench to the plain. They intended to change one town, Heicheng, into a district of the new county seat and move all government

offices to this new district. All this was done behind closed doors – any governmental action that might stir up suspicion among the governed is considered to be potentially disruptive of social stability. If the change of county seat involves little more than the relocation of government offices and the old county seat will remain largely intact despite this administrative shift, there is no point of making a big fuss out of this change. The Haiyuan county government wanted to make any move unnoticed. They wanted to leave before the people became aware.

As it turned out, the county government was barely able to hide the news from local residents. Suspicion was already widespread. To the Haiyuan residents, the relocation of government meant not only the mere physical removal of offices: it indicated the change of focus and the redistribution of developmental resources monopolized by the government. The old county seat would remain stuck, stopped in its premature plan for development, abandoned by a government now moved to a fertile plain. Discontent seathed until June 10th, 2009, when the news was finally confirmed, not by an official public notice, but by a far more explosive scenario: a local resident suddenly noticed that the national emblem used to be hung at the front of the county government building was missing. Without informing the local residents, it seemed, the county government was simply gone. It suggested that this was already a *fait accompli*, an irreversible fact. People were furious – they felt cheated, duped. Indeed they had been. They gathered in front of the emptied building, demanding an official reply from the government.

One crucial fact that should not be overlooked is, that in the Haiyuan county seat where over 60% of the population is Hui, the Han nonetheless make up over 30%. Many of these Han mixed themselves up with the Hui in the mass gathering by wearing a skull

cap or a headscarf, donning conventionally Hui Muslim garments in order to pass for the Hui. It seemed that if what was at stake were merely a general case of a dispute between the governing and the governed over the relocation of an administrative seat in a remote and poverty-stricken county, the balance of power would more likely tilt toward the side of the government, which commanded all the forces necessary to bring down minor unrest. However, to reframe the situation in terms of an "ethnic question" would appear to be a wiser strategy: from an "ordinary" conflict involving socio-economic concerns, the incident would be re-positioned in the "extraordinary" realm of the politics of ethnicity. That 60% of the population was Hui provided a handy demographic condition: if most of the population affected was Hui, then why couldn't we consider it an instance of the "ethnic question?" But *what is an "ethnic question"?* How does one distinguish between questions that merely *involve* ethnic minorities and those other questions that might be termed "properly ethnic" hence situated squarely in the political space given to ethnicity in China's socialism? What form would a "properly ethnic question" assume? And what are the institutional and legal frameworks out of which a "properly ethnic question" might emerge?

These questions will be addressed either explicitly or implicitly in this chapter. First, though, we should finish our story. It turned out that it was not only the local residents who were intent on spinning the issue into a politically sensitive "ethnic question." The county government did not rebuff this attempt at politicization. Instead, they took it up and carried it even further. The explosive power of an "ethnic unrest" paradoxically served to absolve the county government of its culpability in eliciting the crisis with their arbitrary and sneaky decision to relocate their offices. Instead, it was reports of a "Hui

revolt" that were sent to the higher authority, requesting police and military reinforcement. A vice-governor of Ningxia Autonomous Region was pushed to the public forefront to deliver a speech, but his accusatory tone only made things worse. He was literally chased off the podium and hid behind the buffer zone that the local police formed between the deserted county government and the furious crowd. The protest was mainly peaceful, but the fermentation of anger and frustration also caused occasional outbursts of violence. The local police force was quickly outnumbered. The desperate vice-governor issued an ultimatum to the county Hui cadres: either they would personally step out to appease the vociferous Hui, risking their lives, but appealing to the "natural bond" presumed to exist between ethnic cadres and the people they were seen to "represent," or else they would face the irremediable fate of demotion for committing a "political" mistake. The chair of the standing committee of the Haiyuan People's Congress, a Hui cadre for that matter, appeared briefly in front of the crowd, only to prove that the unfolding of the event had already reached a point of no return and the "natural bond" hardly sufficed to avert a crisis. As troops were dispatched to suppress what was supposed to be a "revolt" of an ethnic minority and to restore a stable social order, it seemed that a violent clash would soon engulf the small county of Haiyuan.

What might have seemed like an inevitable bloodshed came to an abrupt end before it even broke out. As the troops were approaching the disoriented crowd scared by the arrival of the military, one old man jumped on top of a car, and in a surprisingly exhilarating tone, announced to the crowd,

> Look out, people! The central government has sent the troops to our aid! The Liberation Army (*jiefang jun*) is coming to liberate us! Folks! Make way for our beloved soldiers! Here come our reinforcements!

Out of either complicity that formed instantaneously or simply being pushed by others unaware of what was happening, the crowd split into two and a path emerged in the middle. Someone in the crowd cheered "Long lives the Liberation Army!" Others promptly picked up and passed it on. The celebratory atmosphere confused the troops, as what they were told was a "revolt" had become less a rebellion than a hyperbolic declaration of loyalty to the central government. The CCP Central Committee in Beijing was immediately informed of the disparity between what was witnessed by the troops on the ground and what transpired in the reports sent to the provincial and the central governments. A conclusion was eventually reached by the CCP Central Committee: the county government had extravagantly exaggerated and distorted the incident. It was determined to have been less an "ethnic revolt" than the result of an inappropriate governmental action. The Central Committee now put the provincial government in full charge of addressing the after-effects and offering a response acceptable to the local population without unnecessary politicization.

I tell the story with all its details because it presents a lively image of almost all the key points that will be addressed in this chapter and the next: the institutional characteristics and limitations of ethnic regional autonomy in China, the predicament of ethnic cadres that cannot be described as merely caught between contradictory forces, and most important of all, the spectral existence, the apparitional nature of the "ethnic question" and its particularly significant relation with "the political" in the specifically Chinese context. Before proceeding with my discussion, some caveats should be given in advance.

First, it is tempting to insert the story into the familiar "redistribution" debate that revolves around the issue of minority rights, especially their socio-economic rights. Although this debate unfolds primarily in the domain of liberal politics, it might seem that one could read this story as an instance of the subaltern's demand for redistribution in a non-liberal political configuration. Indeed, the Hui were making purely socio-economic requests, and their main concern was that the relocation of government offices might entail the freeze on local development. They were indeed demanding a redistribution of resources that might be conducive to the local economic growth. The most interesting point of the story, however, is not *what* was demanded as much as *how* the people – the Hui *and* the Han – went about making their demands and *why* they considered that a certain re-framing of the demands might be more effective than others. That this re-framing backfired perhaps demonstrates not so much its ineffectiveness as its over-effectiveness. Its failure was only a negative and monstrous demonstration of its political potential. The *content* of the demand might point to the *socio-economic rights* of an ethnic group, but the *form* of the demand points to the socio-economic rights of an *ethnic* group, as a group distinct from the generally impoverished. This change of accentuation requires that one go beyond a simple argument for redistribution and pay attention to the particularly "political" nature of the "ethnic question" under the socialist condition.

Second, what might appear no less appealing would be to treat my story as another example of how the weak, the ruled, or the oppressed are not pure victims of authoritarian power and to argue that they can, notwithstanding possible or perhaps frequent failures, appropriate a public political discourse for their own benefits. That in

my story the efforts to reframe the incident in terms of an "ethnic question" backfired cannot in itself dismiss this argument as invalid. Correct as it might be within certain limits, this argument nonetheless fails to capture the subtle meaning of the particular backfiring. The point is not merely to locate the agency of the oppressed, but to trace the contour of the political space in which the "ethnic question" appears in such a form that its apparitional nature entails specific equivocations and ambiguities. The closer one gets to the "ethnic question," the farther it recedes into ever distant background; the keener one wants to get hold of it, the faster it disappears into nothingness.

Third, it has often been argued that the legal and political institution of ethnic regional autonomy in China is merely a replication of Soviet confederated republics. True as this proposition might be, it tells us little by painting the entire picture in broad strokes. This chapter attempts to examine more carefully the internal logics and contradictions of this particularly Chinese institution. Though, as should become clear subsequently, ethnic regional autonomy in China might have given ethnic minorities only a "nominal" right to autonomy, we can also ask: what are the concrete institutional arrangements that might on the one hand keep the this autonomy within the realm of pure name, while on the other intensify the very attraction of this name, making it ever more tenacious and alluring? In other words, what are the substantial structures that might magnify the illusive effects of the illusion without changing its fundamentally illusive nature? It is precisely because ethnic regional autonomy in China both follows and differs from the Soviet model that we are particularly well situated to study the life of nominal autonomy.

Twin Pillars of Autonomy: Territory and Population

Although all accounts of ethnic regional autonomy (*minzu quyu zizhi*) start from a rehearsal of its prehistory, its early embryonic forms in the 1930s, I would like to start from its first systemic formulation in the *Outlines for Ethnic Regional Autonomy* in 1952. I choose this document as my point of departure in order to emphasize the particular space in which I want to locate my discussion. Although one could find examples of "ethnic autonomous government" before the Communists assumed power in 1949 (Central Party School, 1991), those examples were either inconsistent or short-lived and served more as archetypes intended for political propaganda than instances of serious institutional arrangements. Therefore, by starting from the 1952 document, I am setting out to study ethnic regional autonomy as an established institution formulated by a system of rules, regulations and administrative directives after the CCP had achieved and consolidated the monopoly of state power.

The 1952 document came as a direct sequel to the 1949 *Common Outlines of Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference* (hereafter *Common Outlines*), which then served as the provisional constitution of the newly established People's Republic of China. The entire sixth chapter of the *Common Outlines* dictates the foundational framework of ethnic regional autonomy. Article 51 states:

> In regions where ethnic minorities live in concentrated communities, each should execute ethnic regional autonomy. Each should establish its own ethnic autonomous government, the administrative status of which is determined by the amount of population included and the size of the territory covered. In all places where either a particular ethnic group executes autonomy or multiple ethnic groups share the same region, each and every ethnic group should have an appropriate number of their own representatives in the local political organs.

(People Publishing House, 1958b, p.1)

The provisional constitution provides little more than a general scheme for ethnic regional autonomy. Key questions are presented but not answered: How does one define a region where "ethnic minorities live in concentrated communities?" It might appear easy to judge at the first sight, but the question of counting population is immediately complicated by how one divides the territory. If by "living in concentrated communities" one means that the number of a particular ethnic minority should reach a certain proportion in the total local population, then one must in the first place re-define the scope of this "local," and this re-definition would inevitably involve much more than the drawing of administrative boundaries. Note that in Article 51, population is intimately tied to territory. It is a strange circularity: one cannot deal with population unless all reach an agreement on territory; correlatively, one cannot decide on the territorial regional autonomy of an ethnic group unless the minority population that inhabits that region can be considered to "live in concentrated communities." Additionally, the size of a "concentrated community" directly determines its administrative status. It dictates whether the autonomous government should be legally considered on a par with a town government, a county one, or a provincial one. On top of all this, there is also the question of political representation, of guaranteeing that "every ethnic group should have an appropriate number of their own representatives in the local political organs."

The *Common Outlines* in general and Article 51 in particular are merely general principles of a constitutional nature. It is, on the other hand, the 1952 *Outlines of Ethnic Regional Autonomy* that provides a more detailed elaboration. Consider the following four entries extracted from the *Outlines*:

Article 4 With due consideration of the state of relationship between local ethnic minorities, level of economic development, and particular historical conditions, all areas where ethnic minorities live in concentrated communities should establish one of the following forms of autonomous region:

i. An autonomous region based primarily upon the concentrated community of one particular ethnic minority.
ii. An autonomous region based primarily upon the concentrated community of one ethnic minority, but which also includes other proportionally smaller ethnic minorities on the same territory. Those areas within this form of autonomous region where the proportionally smaller minorities live in their own concentrated communities should execute regional autonomy as well.
iii. An autonomous region based primarily upon the unity of the concentrated communities of two or more ethnic minorities. Whether the concentrated communities of the ethnic minorities living in this form of autonomous region should each establish separate ethnic autonomous regions on their own ought to be determined according to the particularities of circumstances and the will of the minorities themselves.

Article 5 In accordance with the local economic and political demands, and with due consideration of historical conditions, each ethnic autonomous region should include both rural and urban inhabitations of the Han. The form of government in those places in an ethnic autonomous region where the Han live in concentrated communities should follow the ordinary governmental form shared nationwide, instead of executing Han regional autonomy. But where there is a large Han population in an autonomous region, a coalitional democratic government of relevant ethnic groups should be established.

Article 6 The administrative boundary of each ethnic autonomous region should be appropriately demarcated according to Articles 4 and 5 in this *Outlines*. If time does not permit appropriate demarcation at the time of the establishment of certain autonomous regions, expedients are allowed for later adjustments.

Article 7 The administrative status of each national autonomous region, that is, whether it is equivalent to a Town (village), a Region, a County, a Special Region or beyond, should be determined according to the population included, territory covered and other relevant conditions.

(People Publishing House, 1958b, p. 67-8)

Article 4 does chart out a brief typology, but a finer distinction between types does not answer the crucial question that we posed previously. If one is caught within the

circularity between territory and population when one tries to define the "concentrated communities" of one single ethnic minority, the predicament is exacerbated when it comes to a judgment on places where two or more ethnic minorities "share the same region." To what extent and in what way, based upon what criteria of dividing both population and territory, can one say that "multiple ethnic groups share the same region?" I deliberately return to the wording of the 1949 *Common Outlines* in order to accentuate the fact that the elaboration of ethnic regional autonomy in the 1952 *Outlines*, instead of spotting and clarifying the ambiguities in the provisional constitution, only increases the confusion. When we read Article 4 alongside Articles 5, 6, and 7, a set of questions immediately arise.

First, why does an ethnic autonomous region, institutionalized by law and intended for the minorities to "administer their own internal affairs" (People Publishing House, 1958b, p. 67), necessarily have to include Han areas? Why do Han settlements within ethnic autonomous regions seem to matter to such a degree that it has to be legalized immediately after the article that grants autonomous rights to ethnic minorities? How does the CCP reconcile this stipulation with its public support for the autonomy of ethnic minorities? In short, how does it convince the minorities and all those who advocate for minority rights that this jarring clause works not so much *against* ethnic autonomy as fundamentally *for* it? Second, Article 6 justifies expedient measures in case "time does not permit appropriate demarcation at the time of the establishment of certain autonomous regions." But how could an ethnic autonomous region be established even before its administrative boundary is settled? If, indeed, there was a rush, foremost among ethnic minorities, to have their own regional autonomy in the 1950s, then why did

boundaries still need to be re-adjusted and re-drawn later, on some occasions perhaps even *against* the will of the autonomy-seeking minorities? In other words, what are the considerations that necessitate more time and more deliberation? Third and this is the purloined letter of the *Outlines*: what is ever present is the vexing absence of any specific numerical standard. We are never told up to what point, what percentage a certain minority or a multiplicity of minorities should share in the total local population in order for a region to qualify for ethnic autonomy. There is, in other words, a critical contradiction that lies at the center of the *Outlines*: if ethnic regional autonomy hinges precisely upon the notion of "concentrated communities," should the very first item listed in the founding law of this political institution not be an articulate stipulation of a numerical threshold? It seems that all the entries in the *Outlines* circle around this all too visible central void, and special care is taken not to touch on this foundational opacity.

A 1951 report to the State Commission of Ethnic Affairs authored by Li Weihan, then head of the CCP Central Department of the United Front, offers a hint:

> The regional autonomy of ethnic minorities advances within the territorial bound of the People's Republic of China, under the centralized leadership of the central government, and follows the route set down by the *Common Outlines of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference*. It is an autonomy founded upon the concentrated communities of ethnic minorities (Its criteria should not be founded upon a certain percentage that minorities share in the local population. Such criteria would be wrong and in violation of the *Common Outlines*.) This is a general principle and a major premise. No equivocation is permitted in regard to this general principle and major premise.
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> (Li, 1981, p. 510)

A caveat is offered in parenthesis, but it's strange that a parenthesis should appear in such a crucial passage, right after the major premise on which "no equivocation is allowed." It seems that misconception of the general principle is so prevalent that it must be pointed

out and avoided at all costs. The confusion is ever present, but its presence must not be allowed to breach the confinement of the grammatical device of parenthesis. Why though would a numerical standard be in violation of the *Common Outlines*? What are the political concerns that necessitate the foundational opacity of the first law on ethnic regional autonomy?

A 1952 lecture given by Ulanhuu on a meeting of the central government provides a relatively more elaborate answer. Ulanhuu was vice-chair of the State Commission of Ethnic Affairs in the 1950s, a veteran Mongolian Party member and founding leader of the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region in 1947 before the Communists officially assumed power in Beijing. He was one of a few ethnic cadres that ever rose to the top levels of the Party. The lecture was a brief report of the main concerns and procedures involved in drafting the *Outlines of Ethnic Regional Autonomy*:

> What kind of place should exercise ethnic regional autonomy? According to the stipulations of the *Common Outlines*, all areas where ethnic minorities live in concentrated communities should qualify. But because of the residential patterns of ethnic minorities in China, the question immediately arises of the ethnic composition of particular autonomous regions. This is a complex and serious matter… [W]hat principles should be heeded in deciding on the ethnic composition of an autonomous region? The draft of the *Outlines* states that this should be decided according to the relationship between ethnic groups, locally specific economic conditions and historical circumstances, on the basis of the equality and free will of the minorities. Some places have over-emphasized the importance of relationship between ethnic groups without paying due attention to economic conditions and historical circumstances, while others have accentuated historical circumstances, overlooking relations between different ethnic groups and economic conditions. But the most common mistake has been a disregard of local economic conditions. All these are inappropriate.
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> (People Publishing House, 1958b, p. 75-6)

I shall now unpack each critical point in this deceptively simple passage. First, the residential pattern of ethnic minorities in China is often dubbed in official discourse as "mostly scattered, yet concentrated in compact communities wherever they reside, or living mixed and criss-crossed with one another and with the Han" (*da zaju/da fen san, xiao juju, jiaocuo zaju*) (State Commission of Ethnic Affairs, 2010, p. 1). In an essay published in the early 1960s by Li Weihan, out of the six characterizations of minorities in China, the very first two are the difference in the amount of their population and their complex geographical distribution (Li, 1980, p. 1-2). On the one hand, ethnic minorities are scattered all over China and except for a few places such as Tibet, their number is in general statistically minor compared to the local Han population. On the other hand, they are often widely distributed over the vast Chinese territory, and some ethnic groups, such as the Hui, are so dispersed that the majority of their population fall into discrete villages in rural areas or no more than a few neighborhoods in a city. One can imagine a map of dots of various sizes randomly scattered, to the point where it is impossible to find any clear-cut pattern of distribution. This is a major problem in designing the institutional plan for ethnic regional autonomy.

Second, what appeared in Ulanhuu's report also appeared in the official *Outlines*, but with a crucial difference: in the *Outlines*, what seemed to be a marginal note, namely that the design of an autonomous region should stay "in accordance with the local economic and political demand" and give due attention to historical conditions, became in Ulanhuu's report a major concern. Note how he framed these critical elements: relations *between* ethnic groups, historical circumstances, and the most important and neglected of all, economic conditions. These are general and abstract cautions, but they nonetheless reveal

a thread that runs through the particular space in which the "ethnic question" is construed: the very object that will be worked on, the "raw material" which the political scheme of ethnic regional autonomy intends to transform is not particular minorities, but *relations* among minorities and between the minorities and the Han majority. The point is not recognizing the limited political sovereignty of any specific ethnic minority as much as *organizing relations* between and among ethnic groups in such a way as to be conducive to the local "economic conditions."

Two specific examples can substantiate this general point. First, around 1956, a debate among the CCP committee of Guangxi Province on the details of establishing a Zhuang Autonomous Region culminated in a competition between two contrastive plans. Both of them revolved around the future of Guixi Zhuang Autonomous Region which had already existed for a couple of years in the western half of the Guangxi Province. The dispute boiled down to this: should the Guixi Zhuang Autonomous Region remain intact and break from the Guangxi Province and be established as an independent provincial autonomous region administratively on a par with the newly contracted Guangxi Province which will include only the eastern half of the current province? Or, should one opt for the other plan, and instead of elevating Guixi to a provincial autonomous region, transform the entire Guangxi Province into a single Zhuang Autonomous Region? In other words, should one, instead of keeping Guixi intact, expand it to such an extent that the entire eastern half of Guangxi is included within the new Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region? Li Weihan endorsed the second option, and he called this plan "the one of unification." How he justified this preference reveals in a particularly intriguing way the concrete deliberative procedure in establishing ethnic autonomous regions.

According to Li, the main reason behind the plan of "division," as the first plan was referred to, was that in Guangxi Province in general, the Han constituted the majority, with the Zhuang population sharing a mere 36.9%. Li did not deny this demographic fact, but the turn of his argument was somewhat surprising: if this difference of population should become the reason for division, then how do we justify the establishment of the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, where the ratio of the Han population is even higher, around 83%, or countless other autonomous prefectures and counties where the percentage of minority population is even lower? Countering the argument for numerical threshold, Li did not propose what *shall* be done. To the contrary, he was merely pointing out what *had already been* done. He wanted to remind his opponents and to make them realize retrospectively the very logic that had from the outset operated the plan for ethnic regional autonomy: if a numerical standard was set, it would be highly possible that none of the already existing ethnic autonomous regions, even those that had up to now remained unanimously undisputable, would make sense. In order to buttress his argument against the setting of a numerical standard, Li went on to provide a more or less mythological account of how ethnic minorities had in the course of history been coerced by the dominant Han into barren mountainous areas and how this geographical marginalization constituted a proof of the oppression they had been subjected to before the coming of the CCP. Situated in the context of this story, the first plan amounted to an evasion of the responsibility that the Han ought now to assume to make up for their past mistake – an argument that echoed Premier Zhou Enlai's announcement that the Han should "repay the debts" they had incurred on the ethnic minorities (People Publishing House, 1958a, p.142-3). Equality between different ethnic groups, declared in the 1954

Constitution and in the *Outlines*, is defined not merely as a legal-juridical stricture, but also as a call to achieve the so-called "equality in fact" (State Commission of Ethnic Affairs, 2009, p.278-84). Leaving the minorities on their own, argued Li, was precisely contrary to what was intended by the institution of ethnic regional autonomy and would not be conducive to the well-being of the impoverished minorities. The general distribution of population in Guangxi was considerably uneven, with the Han half densely populated and the Zhuang half sparsely inhabited. What further complicated the picture was that the Han half actually amounted to less than a literal half – the Han area occupied only 30% of the total Guangxi territory. Li reframed this demography in an interesting proposition: that the percent of the Han population is in reverse proportion to the percent of the Han territory in Guangxi. Therefore, he argued, it made perfect sense to unify both the population and the territory of the Han *and* the Zhuang.

Li justified this option by recourse to a concern with the local economic condition. The Han area was agriculturally more developed and technologically advanced, but the dense population and the scarcity of land would undoubtedly become the bottleneck for future development. The Zhuang area, on the other hand, was literally a virgin land, with both fertile farmland and, more important, enormous reserves of mineral resources crucial for industrialization. The "equality in fact" between ethnic groups required that the Han work closely with the Zhuang and unconditionally share their more advanced technology necessary for exploiting the resources buried underground. This was seen as a concrete rendition of the abstract political slogan "the joint prosperity of all ethnic groups in China," enshrined in successive Chinese constitutions. To Li, this could not be accomplished except when the entire Guangxi was turned into a unified administrative

zone – in other words, an expanded Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. A rigid insistence on numerical standard was replaced by a concern with how one should organize the population and the territory and how one should appropriately draw the boundaries of administrative zones, in order that the local economic circulation – dominated initially by state plans but later released from the "cage" in the 1980s – could happen in such a manner that the impoverished were provided and the advanced given a more capacious space. An insistence on numerical standard in this case would necessarily be counterproductive and work precisely contrary to the goal of ethnic regional autonomy.

My elaboration on the first example saves me from an equally extensive discussion of the second. Yet a crucial element is nonetheless missing in the first: Li was primarily concerned with economic conditions. Although considerations of relations between ethnic groups were not entirely absent, they were nonetheless not thematized. This is where the second example comes in. According to a report given by Ulanhuu on a 1957 meeting of the National People's Congress, there were two different plans for a provincial Hui autonomous region as well. Aside from all the geographical details and without laying out all the economic concerns (the hydro-power project, the distribution of mineral resources, oil reserve, pasture, etc.) whose importance was covered in the first example, I shall emphasize another crucial difference between the two plans: Plan A, the one that was eventually adopted, excluded certain counties in Pingliang and Tianshui of Gansu Province, which were included in Plan B. To be sure, in the prospective Hui autonomous region outlined by Plan A, the Hui would take up one third of the total population, and one might expect this number to go up if the excluded counties were to

be included, since both Pingliang and Tianshui were predominantly Hui areas. But the primary concern of Plan A was not to dilute Hui population. In the words of Ulanhuu,

> Plan B is of course not without its advantages. However, if we include those counties in Pingliang and Tianshui, the question will become more complicated. Because the reactionary ruling classes had in the past sowed discords among the Hui and the Han in Pingliang, the relations between these two groups have remained sour for ages. Although the Emancipation has fundamentally alleviated the conflicts, a long period of time is still needed for the dissolution of mutual distrust. Taking into account such a circumstance of inter-ethnic relations, it was unanimously agreed upon by all sides in the negotiation that Plan B is off the table.
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> (People Publishing House, 1958a, p. 164-5)

In other words, the administrative zoning of an autonomous region works not by integrating all closely located "concentrated communities" of minorities as much as precisely against this: the zoning should exclude those areas where inter-ethnic relations are tense no matter the composition of local population. The point is not to divide the Hui from the Han, but to divide the areas where the Hui and the Han are on good terms from those where they are not. The basic unit of isolation is not individual ethnic group, but a space in which the *relations* between multiple ethnic groups can be balanced and peaceful. It is not a matter of *ethnic* regional autonomy as much as one of ethnic *regional* autonomy. However, if this is the case, why did the CCP have to go with "ethnic" autonomy in the first place?

Two key words were ubiquitous in the CCP documents on the ethnic question in the 1950s: democratic reform (*minzhu gaige*) and socialist reform (*shehuizhuyi gaizao*). The former was intended to eliminate social and economic institutions presumed to exist upon the basis of exploitation; it was carried out relentlessly to create a classless society. The latter built upon the ground leveled by the former and took a step forward towards the

socialization of production. This dual reform, generalized in the Han area, was initially cautiously adapted in minority regions. Consider the example of Tibet. In the protocol between the CCP and the Tibetan government in 1951, it was agreed upon that the contemporary political system of Tibet remained intact and the political power of Dalai Lama stayed unimpaired (People Publishing House, 1958b, p. 31). In a 1956 lecture on a Politburo meeting, Li Weihan raised eight suggestions for what was called "peaceful reform," a term reserved particularly for the democratic and socialist reforms among ethnic minorities. "The peaceful reform," said Li, "is a special form of class struggle. It's fundamentally revolutionary in terms whether of its purpose, its content, or its nature. But the specific form it takes can be gentle, roundabout and progressive" (Li, 1987, p. 317). One reason behind this gentle approach is that the reforms would inevitably transform the political structures of certain minority regions and it was presumed that possibly violent uprisings incited primarily by the powerful elites might ensue were care not taken (Li, 1980). Democratic and socialist reforms, even though for the good of the ethnic masses, should nonetheless be executed in a roundabout way – a stance soon to be forfeited in actual politics.

The dual reform also produced its own ideological consequences. A profound theoretical confusion was common among the CCP cadres in the 1950s: if the dual reform had been duly achieved among the minorities; if institutions of exploitation and oppression had been completely eradicated and all ethnic groups had therefore been initiated into a socialist society; if the national economy had been placed in a "cage" and organized centrally by the government, then why was it still necessary to establish *ethnic*

autonomous regions? According to a 1953 report by the State Commission of Ethnic Affairs,

> It must be abided that all work among the minorities should adequately take into account the special characteristics and particular conditions of each ethnic group. The specific situation of each ethnic minority is highly complex. They are different not only from the Han in regard to politics, economy, culture, religious belief, customs and habits. They are even different among themselves. Different clans or different religious denominations within a single minority might differ to different extent; different economic occupations (agriculture or husbandry) might also entail internal differences. Therefore, when we work among the minorities, care must be taken with the particular circumstance of each ethnic group, with the political, economic, cultural, customary and habitual specificities of each and every minority. One should not mechanistically transfer the experience gained in the Han areas to the minority areas. Neither should one transfer experience that works within one particular ethnic autonomous region to a different ethnic autonomous region.
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> …According to what we see currently, the mechanistic transference of the experience that works only in Han areas to minority areas without regard for the particularities of the autonomous regions is not an exception. It's a common phenomenon that exists in a large number of places.
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> (People Publishing House, 1958b, p. 103-4)

"Cultures, customs and habits" should be "respected," but respected in such a way as to be treated as "facts," as something that was simply there and should be taken into account just like the climatic conditions or geographic locations. That the Tibetans were habitual consumers of *tsampa* or the Mongolians were fond of *hursen aamu* was presumed to be determined by the particular natural conditions of their life (State Commission of Ethnic Affairs, 1990, p. 69). The most appropriate way to address these differences was not to change them, as had been done by many Han cadres, but to "respect" them, to work *with* them, to intervene in such a manner that these "facts" worked not against the intervention but for it. Han chauvinism (*da hanzu zhuyi*) in this case was given a particular meaning and

situated within a particular discursive space: it was defined as an *administrative* failure in organizing local *economy*. A Han chauvinist made the same kind mistake as committed by a governor who ignored the particular geographical location and natural landscape of his jurisdiction when he designed plans for local development. On the surface, it seems that the "respect" granted ethnic "customs and habits" is indeed directed specifically at ethnic minorities, but what is actually the object that is brought to bear these administrative acts and governmental interventions? What conceptual zooming – in or out – is needed in order for us to find the most appropriate focal length by means of which the object can be constituted by becoming visible in front of our eyes?

If the establishment of an autonomous region must not follow a numerical standard; if the demarcation of an autonomous region is determined by a concern with the optimal organization of local economic circulation and the relations *between* ethnic groups; if the "cultures, customs, and habits" are respected as organic components of the local environment and incorporated into a general economy, it is arguable that the very object which takes shape under the institution of ethnic regional autonomy is precisely not ethnic minorities treated as distinct groups bound by historically formed identities. To the contrary, the object that forms the counterpoint that receives the governmental intervention is a particularly conceived and openly dynamic space. It is this *space*, this *field* of relations of circulation that is altered and worked upon. The point is not to change the status of a particular ethnic group, but to organize the space *between* a multiplicity of ethnic groups; to "respect" the specific customs and habits of the

minorities from an *external* point of view; and to financially assist the production and distribution of special commodities that cater to the demands of ethnic consumption patterns – in other words, to intervene *indirectly* by way of market exchange. According to this framework, it is essential to intervene in a way that benefits each and every ethnic group, not separately, but as a unity, and unified in a dynamic sphere infused with relations that weave the fabric of circulation. It is in this specific sense that the institution of ethnic regional autonomy is designed to facilitate the joint prosperity of all ethnic groups in China, and the pattern of distribution of ethnic minorities in China (that they are highly dispersed) which might appear at the first sight to be a major – perhaps *the* major – obstacle to a territorially based ethnic regional autonomy, is turned in this framework into an advantage. What initially set out in name as a *political* scheme informed by Bolshevik Marxism ultimately boils down in substance to an *administrative* arrangement.

What this means first and foremost is that we can no longer treat ethnic regional autonomy in China as primarily a question of the political rights of ethnic minorities, if one continues to locate political rights in a purely legal-juridical space. It is now clear that the subject who bears the "preferential treatments" in an autonomous region is not an actual ethnic minority as much as the *space* of economic circulation that exists *between* a multiplicity of ethnic groups. A legal-juridical definition of rights necessarily presupposes one particular ethnic group to be the bearer of preferential treatments and the receiver of governmental intervention (Sautman, 2010; Potter, 2005; Sautman, 1999, 1998; Lundberg, 2009;

Lundberg & Zhou, 2009b, 2009a; Leijonhufvud & ran, 2009; Zhang, 2009; Zhou, 2009). One could – perhaps should – debate on whether a legal-juridical framework would be conducive to the politics of ethnic difference in China, but we should nonetheless have a clear idea of what ethnic regional autonomy is in and of itself, as a fact that has existed for over fifty years.

Second, just as the dispersed distribution of minority population is turned from a disadvantage into an advantage, given that the very purpose of ethnic regional autonomy is the organization of inter-ethnic relations and the facilitation of local economic circulation, the very circularity of population and territory which I mentioned as a predicament at the beginning of this section is also resolved. In the mid-1950s, the State Council promulgated a series of administrative directives that addressed the ambiguous administrative status of autonomous regions. On the one hand, the word "region" (*qu*) was reserved only for provincial-level autonomous areas; on the other, previous autonomous areas which in terms of territory and population were merely the size of towns were no longer called "autonomous," but simply "ethnic towns" (*minzu xiang*). It was presumed that a town could not effectively exercise any right to autonomy (People Publishing House, 1958a, p. 58-61). Autonomous areas were integrated into the general administrative system, each assigned a place in the regulatory grid, as a province, a prefecture, a county, or a town. This was the first step toward an optimal organization of resources and relations and also explained why ethnic towns were not considered to be capable of exercising the right to autonomy: the town, as an administrative level immediately above often dispersed

villages, was merely too small and confined, with resources and powers too limited for it to constitute a "field." It was incapable of organizing inter-ethnic relations and economic circulation on its own. It always had to depend upon the county administration for all its concrete interventions. That ethnic towns were not labeled "autonomous" was due primarily to how local governance worked and continues to work in rural China and not on any abstract legal-juridical notion of ethnic autonomy. The circuitry of territory and population was rendered irrelevant by being relocated in a space of practical administration.

Foucault's notion of biopolitics becomes in this context a particularly important and appropriate concept in characterizing the basic parameters of the institution of ethnic regional autonomy. When one considers the logic behind the denial of an "autonomous" status to ethnic towns, one can indeed find a strong case of the biopolitics at work – recall Foucault's argument on the fundamental change from the management of family to the governance of state, a shift that is impossible without the emergence of a set of "human sciences," foremost among which is "statistics," the science of the "statist," and how a change of scale is by no means merely a quantitative expansion (Foucault, 1973, 2007). However, there are at least two reasons for which one should be cautious in applying this concept to ethnic regional autonomy in China.

First, the concept of the biopolitical is embedded in Foucault's study of the historical transformations of govermentality and administrative modernity. But it does not cover the entire range of administrative modernity, which also includes, for example, "police state" in 18th century Europe. Furthermore, biopolitics has a

special affinity – if not an exclusive affiliation – with liberal and neoliberal governance, and Foucault is always hesitant to speak of "socialist govermentality." In his 1979 lecture at Collège de France on the birth of biopolitics, Foucault raised the following questions:

> What would really be the governmentality appropriate to socialism? Is there a governmentality appropriate to socialism? What governmentality is possible as a strictly, intrinsically, and autonomously socialist govermentality?

To these questions, Foucault replied,

> In any case, we know only that if there is a really socialist governmentality, then it is not hidden within socialism and its texts. It cannot be deduced from them. It must be invented.
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> (Foucault, 2008, p. 94)

Therefore, to what extent can we say that the state organization of population and territory, the planned distribution of natural and social resources in China's ethnic autonomous regions in the 1950s, belonged to a biopolitical framework? Furthermore, given that some scholars have chosen the post-1980 China as one exemplar of the neoliberal model (cf. Harvey, 2005; also Ong, 2006, to a lesser extent), can we therefore argue perhaps with more confidence that because of the general change induced by the economic and social reform after the Cultural Revolution, the institution of ethnic regional autonomy has finally taken up the feature of a biopolitics in contemporary times?

Second, according to Foucault, biopolitics is "a set of mechanisms through which the basic biological features of the human species became the object of a political strategy, of a general strategy of power" (Foucault, 2007, p. 1). But inter-

ethnic relations and the "cultures, customs and habits" of ethnic minorities cannot be seen as "biological facts" of "the human species." The Foucauldian "milieu" does not include these features which do not belong to the human as "a species." But this does not necessarily mean that we should completely abandon the concept. If the "cultures" of ethnic minorities influence the flow of commodities and their ways of life; if some goods (for example, barley to the Tibetans) are inherently painted with an "ethnic" color; if the continuity of customs and habits always requires material carriers (for example, when the possibility of attaining certain kinds of goods determines whether one can hold certain rituals) and will consequently impact the production, circulation, and consumption of certain commodities, the organization of inter-ethnic relations and the respect given to ethnic customs and habits are not so much outside biopolitics as forming a necessary extension of it. They do not negate the biopolitical as much as complicate it. They are located in a biopolitical *regime* and follow the lines of forces regulated by the biopolitical way of intervention.

If now we can at least cautiously use the term "biopolitics" to point out the general direction in which ethnic regional autonomy can be conceptualized, we can also walk the path in the opposite direction. Even if it is the *space* between different ethnic groups that constitutes the major object of intervention, it is nonetheless a space between different *ethnic* groups. Although the question of ethnic *regional* autonomy is located in a *biopolitical* space, it is nonetheless an *ethnic* autonomy that still bears a *political* significance. The predominance of the biopolitical regime does not exclude or dilute politics as much as reinforce it. An

administrative institution intended to organize relations *between* ethnic groups and facilitate joint prosperity of all nonetheless gives rise to an inflation of ethno-national consciousness, to the point where some scholars are so alarmed as to propound for the total abolition of ethnic regional autonomy (Ma, 2004). For if one must in one's governmental intervention respect ethnic customs and habits taken as ready-made facts or reconcile with the pattern in which local inter-ethnic relations have been maintained for centuries, one must come to terms with this central predicament: the more one descends into the specific local conditions of ethnic minorities, the more a *biopolitical* administration will *look* like a *political* preference. A plan that does not deal *immediately* with ethnic minorities nonetheless produces a real effect that divides and dissociates along ethnic lines. The "ethnic question," seen through the prism of ethnic regional autonomy, bears precisely this spectral character.

Neither Liberalism nor Soviet Socialism, or, the Translation between the Political and the Biopolitical

The biopolitical logic in the governance of ethnic minorities in China goes far beyond the regulation of the literal economy, and the respect for ethnic "customs and habits" sometimes reaches an extent that even exceeds that afforded by liberal politics. This can be seen particularly in the field of criminal law. A general principle often followed by the court in adjudicating criminal cases involving ethnic minorities is dubbed *liang shao yi kuan* ("less arrests, less death penalties, more leniency"). This is not a legal sanction but a general principle laid down by the CCP as part of the "preferential treatments" granted ethnic minorities. An

essay published in 2001 on the *Journals of China University of Political Science and Law* and widely circulated and cited among both academic discussions and governmental websites argued that this obscure principle should be replaced by "legislative accommodation." It argued that each ethnic autonomous region should promulgate its own local laws or local accommodations of state criminal law that address more specifically their own particular conditions –

> Ethnic minorities have been living in their particular social orders formed over a long period of time. Their mental state and modes of behavior are confined and influenced by myriad customs, habits and religious beliefs. This determines that the behaviors of ethnic minorities cannot break loose from the circumscription of the conventions and ideas of their social world. The kind of criminal acts they may commit against the law is primarily a product of their unreflective compliance with the customs and ideas of their particular societies. Their motivation is often innocent; there is no or little intention to disrupt the social order. Objectively speaking, these behaviors often have minor negative impacts on the social order of the minority areas; no unease of the people or social chaos is entailed, no harm to the society done. Taking into account both the subjective lack of intention and the minor objective impacts of the criminal acts, it is therefore necessary that the legal judgments on criminal acts by ethnic minorities should be differentiated from the general case and addressed by means of legal accommodation.
>
> (Liang & Shi, 2001, p. 32-3)

The argument is two-fold: on the one hand, it is presumed that there is no active intention behind the possibly criminal acts of the ethnic minorities. Their actions are not supposed to emanate from a sovereignty subject capable of pre-meditation and self-reflective decision. It is their social conventions that throughout time have permeated their modes of behavior and states of mind. On the other, if there is no pre-meditated intention on the part of the actor, there is equally no social order that can be disrupted. Since the criminal acts are nothing but the effects of

social conventions and ideational norms within minority societies, they are only absorbed back into a circuitry which, instead of disrupting social order, merely reinforces it. The lack of agency on the part of actors is coupled with the hegemony of social conventions – it is because the minorities are thought to be tightly bound by particular social orders that they can be acquitted of their criminal acts. This is fundamentally an anthropological argument: they don't mean to disrupt social order, and neither will the social order be disrupted. The essay continues to offer examples of these ethnic "criminal acts" predisposed by "customs and habits:" early teen marriage and forced sexual intercourse, widespread polygamy and bigamy, circulation of locally made weapons, and murder prompted by witchcraft accusation. All these are adjudicated according to the dual consideration I mentioned previously: whether these acts grow out of a submissive compliance with ethnic conventions and whether they constitute significant disruptions of the local social order.

The interesting point is that the very moment that might induce the searing debate on recognition and moral sensibility in liberal politics (Brown, 2006; Taylor, 1992; Taylor & Gutmann, 1992; Fraser, 2009; Povinelli, 2002; Fraser, 1995, 2000), is turned into one for anthropological evaluation in this biopolitical regime. The Taylorian type of argument is not suppressed as much as missing altogether: it is neither a question of toleration nor one of the re-distribution of recognition as a common good. The question at stake is not the incommensurability of radically different worlds. There might be repulsions and condemnations, but they are never *politically* thematized and always remain

subterraneous. Neither the politics of recognition nor the "politics of acknowledgement" (Markell, 2003) can emerge in this space. Both "affirmative" recognition and "transformative" re-structuration – to borrow the words of Nancy Fraser – do not and cannot exist in this space (Fraser, 1997). This absence cannot be attributed to the authoritarian oppression by the CCP. In fact, one can find the very opposite: to a Western liberal like Charles Taylor, the ethnic minorities in China might be seen as enjoying *too much* instead of too little freedom; they are given free rein to their "customs and habits," to the point where even criminal law has to be "accommodated" to local particularities. An authoritarian political structure now looks more "liberal" than a liberal politics. A radical "relativism" emerges in the form of a biopolitical recasting of the "ethnic question." Ethnic minorities are free on their own to be bound by their binding customs and habits insofar as they are considered to be confined by "the genealogical society" (Povinelli, 2006).

It is precisely at the site of this radical "relativism" that the biopolitical arrangement of ethnic regional autonomy most acutely encounters its internal contradiction. Should one interpret "legal accommodation" merely as a pretext for granting ethnic minorities juridical privileges that exempt them from legal prosecution which others are nonetheless subjected to in a similar situation? Or should one interpret it as an administrative measure which aims at maintaining social order? When we move from socio-economic development and organization of inter-ethnic relations to the question of ethnic "customs and habits" and of "legal accommodation," the administrative governance of ethnic minorities also

moves increasingly away from the strictly Foucauldian biopolitics. The interesting point is that the more we move away from the biopolitical core to the margin of its regulatory network, the more easily the entire biopolitical regime can be overturned. Put differently, one can take the logic of legislative accommodation as a principle of intelligibility and turn one's eyes back on the organization of socio-economic development and ask: is it not nonetheless the socio-economic development of an *ethnic* autonomous region that is organized? Can we argue that the biopolitical, when it comes to the "ethnic question," is always overdetermined by the political?

The *name* of *ethnic* regional autonomy is articulated with the *substance* of ethnic *regional* autonomy. The crucial point is that although the substance is opposed to the name, it works not so much against it as much as reinforces it, making the name ever more substantial without leading it beyond the threshold of spectral existence. The mode of relationship between politics and biopolitics seems less an external articulation than an internal contamination or indeterminate translation: the more one descends into the biopolitical, the more one rises up to the political; the more one looks into the substance, the more one is dazzled by an apparitional name.

I began this chapter with a long story; now I shall end it with a short one. Different from Haiyuan which is a rural county in a provincial Hui autonomous region, Guancheng is only a Hui district (*huizu qu*) in Zhengzhou. The name of the district does not include "autonomous." Neither does it enjoy any autonomous status. According to official statistics in 2011, the Hui population in Guangcheng

district constitutes merely 5.9% of the total local population. I was befuddled by this considerably low number when I was doing my fieldwork, and I did hear some Hui officials were worried that this low number might prompt the higher authorities to consider taking "Hui" off the name of Guangcheng District. In my interview with the director of the District Bureau of Ethnic and Religious Affairs, I asked, "Now that the Hui occupy only 6% of the total population, and that some have been worrying that this might induce the change of the district's name, are you worried as well?" She grinned. But immediately, she lowered her voice,

> I don't think that can be done. Yes, the number is low. But if you change the name, people will start to ask questions: will the policy change again? Will the state no longer recognize the rights of ethnic minorities? Does this mean that the Hui will no longer be respected and considered equal to the Han? Is a new tide of Han chauvinism at bay? You see, people will suspect and things will become thorny.

Part II

CHAPTER 7

Good Sentiment, Bad Sentiment: Political Representation and Ethnic Cadre

In chapter six, I have examined ethnic regional autonomy as a major socialist institution in the governance of ethnic difference in China and have distinguished it from both the classical Leninist model and the liberal politics of redistribution and recognition. I have argued that it is based upon a biopolitical regime, one which does not address as much as deny the existence and political relevance of ethnic difference. This denial, however, produces its own irony by paradoxically intensifying ethnic consciousness and accentuating the spectral character of ethnicity in the Chinese socialist politics. In this chapter, I study another key institution that demonstrates in a different way the internal contradictions and paradoxes of the socialist politics of ethnicity: the appointment of ethnic cadres into the administrative body of the state. I examine the particular subject position of ethnic cadres in the Chinese state bureaucracy and try to analyze this position by mapping out the bureaucratic institutional landscape in which it is inscribed. This institutional landscape both mediates and defines the terms which frame the "ethnic question" as it is seen by the Chinese state in its routine governmental acts. I will

describe how the "ethnic question" is conceived as governable by means of bureaucratic institutional mediation and how the subjectivity of ethnic cadres – in fact the foreclosure of subject formation in the position they are given to inhabit in the bureaucratic machine – is carved out by this institutional logic.

Becoming an Ethnic Cadre: the Story of Qixiang

I met Qixiang a month into my fieldwork in the city of Zhengzhou, in his small makeshift office located in a hotel room instead of a government building. It was a gloomy day, and I was called upon to meet him an hour earlier than the time we had originally decided when we spoke the day before over the phone. "I forgot that lunch ends at 2 instead of 3 p.m." He told me on the phone, "So come. Let's talk." Short and hasty, his voice sounded a bit anxious. He knew that I was a Hui doing a PhD at Columbia, and that I was in Zhengzhou for my dissertation fieldwork. He had been briefed a week ago by the secretary of the Henan Provincial Islamic Association by way of whose introduction I was first connected to Qixiang.

Qixiang was the deputy chief (*fu chuzhang*) of a newly established division in the Henan Provincial Commission of Ethnic Affairs (*henansheng minzu shiwu weiyuanhui*). A young Hui cadre, he had an impressive and promising record of bureaucratic career: rising from a low position as the deputy head of a rural town in his late 20s, he worked his way steadily and patiently up the hierarchy, first from a suburban town to an urban district, and then eventually into the provincial government. It is perhaps not far-fetched to presume that a splendid career awaits him, and his young age and experience in navigating the political minefield would make him a competitive candidate for new

rounds of political promotion. But the irony of his career trajectory, however, did not take long to surface. The story was much more complicated than the linear progression it might at first appear to an outside observer unversed in the cunning wit of China's bureaucracy.

I did not expect to meet him in a hotel room. Neither had I prepared myself for a somewhat embarrassing fact: that his new division, established in 2009, was staffed only by three persons. For unknown reasons, one of those three had been appointed to another government office and held a merely nominal institutional affiliation with Qixiang's division. As the deputy chief, therefore, Qixiang was a leader only of himself. Compared to the tepid attitude I received on the phone, his passionate welcome and encouraging support in person caught me in a pleasant surprise. Knowing full well that I was still a graduate student, he insisted on calling me "Doctor Ha," and not just for the purpose of propriety. As we spoke, I was amazed by his rich knowledge of classical anthropology and the tumultuous history of ethnology in China. To demonstrate his qualification in engaging in this more or less academic conversation, Qixiang proudly announced to me that he received his undergraduate degree in cultural anthropology from South-Central University for Nationalities, located in Hubei Province and one of a nationwide network of nationality universities and colleges (*minzu daxue*/*minzu xueyuan*) established by the state for training ethnic cadres. But Qixiang, perhaps different from many of his minority classmates, did not immediately land in a position after graduation that related to his Hui ethnic identity. He became, on the other hand, a cadre *from* an ethnic group, but not an ethnic cadre *per se* – a distinction that will be explained as this chapter moves along.

Qixiang earned his party membership while he was still in college. By the age of thirty, he was already the vice party secretary and deputy head of a suburban town soon to be included in the expansive urban planning project of Zhengzhou. The town he presided over was integrated into the industrial developmental plan devised by the Zhengzhou Municipal Government, and Qixiang was promoted, as someone who had a college degree and presumed to be capable of handling the new and rapidly changing socio-economic situation, to the position of deputy director of the newly established industrial park zoned in the very town where he served his term. The change was a turning point in his career: instead of governing a rural town, he had in his early 30s a newly urbanized area with enormous potential for economic growth under his jurisdiction. He might still be positioned low in the official hierarchy for a few years to come, but his power in commanding much needed political and economic resources had won him a critical edge over his peers in future promotions. “In those years”, Qixiang recounted to me, in a proud tone nonetheless tainted by a somber nostalgia, “I worked like a machine, like a steam ship always in full power. Every day was different. New things kept coming up. I slept little but I seldom felt exhausted. Have you seen the Dehua Pedestrian Street?” He was referring to the flourishing shopping district at the center of February 7th Square, now the landmark of the commercial success of Zhengzhou. “It was *I* who almost single-handedly worked out the entire project!” said him, “I know every single detail of the whole plan. I already realized how profitable it could be even back then! Now everyone sees it. It yields a tremendous amount of revenue for the municipal government, and the commercial opportunities it offers are immense.” “Now,” he added, “when you drink

water from the well, you should never forget who dug it in the first place. (*chi shui bu wang wa jing ren*)"

I was a bit tired, and listening to his long autobiographical story was draining, especially when it seemed to pertain to my research only obliquely. I tried to steer him back to the present, but all I could get out of him was a lengthy recitation of his past achievements. It seemed that Qixiang had no intention to wind his personal recollection in the direction I would favor – it looked like he had little to say about his current job, which was the reason I had sought out talking to him. I was growing weary of his lengthy recounting of the "golden days" of his past. The first encounter ended in his impassioned suggestion for a second meeting, and a disappointing frustration of my research plan.

But it later turned out that we did keep a relatively continuous relation throughout my work. I occasionally received calls from him late at night, telling me that he was still in his office. He would also complain to me that due to long hours' typing in front of a computer, now and then he would lose control of his own hands. He worried that the feeling of numbness and paralysis is an early symptom of Alzheimer's disease. I volunteered to help with the paperwork, and during the days and nights that followed, he started to take me as a "little brother" who, according to him, was also a "workaholic" (*pin ming san lang*). "I can see in you my own image, the image of me in those early years!" He often said to me. My interviews were often conducted in the same office while we were both busy typing in front of computer screens. Every once in a while, we would stop, and he might treat me to a bowl of noodles. He would have them delivered to the room, and we would get into a more or less focused conversation.

Qixiang was assigned to the Henan Provincial Commission of Ethnic Affairs in 2005, from his low position in the suburban town. The change that caused this bureaucratic relocation came the year before by way of a violent Hui-Han conflict whose particular ferocity immediately caught the attention of international media (BBC News; Al-Jazeera; Khan & Buckley, 2004). "No one will tell you this," Qixiang preceded his tale with a caution, "I was there in person, seeing all and experiencing everything." He continued,

> It was near mid-night and I was sleeping, when I got a call, directly from the head of Department of Organization of the Provincial Party Committee. I was surprised since this was truly rare -- you never receive calls from such a high-level leader directly. The call was short, and I was summoned for an emergency. I was told to pack my things, bring thick coats and three days' ration (*ganliang*), and prepare myself for a formidable mission. I was later briefed that we were called upon to drive into the village of Nanren in Zhongmou County and to stop a Hui-Han confrontation that was quickly escalating.

Nanren is a small Hui village on the outskirts of Zhengzhou with a population of around 5000, surrounded by Han villages that extend to the vicinity of the neighboring city of Kaifeng. A major occupation of the Hui in Nanren is short-distance freight transport, and their trucks have to travel daily through the Han villages so as to gain access to the outside world. Over the years the surrounding Han villagers had become increasingly resentful since the frequent passes of heavy loaded trucks had rendered the task of road maintenance too back-breaking and costly and they had to bear the piling expenses all on their own. The simmering discontent eventually exploded with a small incident as the fuse. On October 27, 2004, when a truck driven by a Hui tried to get through, a Han parked his car in the middle of the road, blocking the pass and refusing to move. The minor friction quickly escalated into a violent fight and drew in scores of Han villagers. The Hui truck was burnt down and the Hui driver fled to Nanren. Later that night, the

humiliated Hui driver convened a large number of his Hui villagers and the group marched back to the Han village for revenge, but were defeated and chased away. The morning of the 28th saw a huge return of the Hui villagers. They were a poorly armed yet ferociously angered peasant army of approximately 300 people confronting a much larger army consisting of the disgruntled Han from most of the surrounding villages. One Hui man was killed in the chaos, two badly injured, one of whom later died on the way to the local hospital. The third death on the Hui side occurred when a Hui man tried to escort his wife home through a Han village after her shift. The man was seized by the angry mob and brutally killed, his head cut off and defaced. News of the conflict spread fast: nearby Hui villages with marriage ties to Naren Hui became key sites where outside support were enlisted to assist the besieged Nanren. In response, the Han villagers set up road blocks and checkpoints to stall any outside Hui support. A group of Hui supporters from a nearby village killed a Han guard when their truck tried to break through the road block. As the sun was setting on the night of 27th, the confrontation saw no signs of subsiding, though the two sides had temporarily retreated. They seemed to be merely recouping for the next round. The silence of deadlock was haunted by the smell of an impending bloodshed. It was at this crucial moment, in the middle of the night, that Qixiang received the call from his supervisor.

However, the officials' cars were also blocked at the checkpoint. The Han villagers were highly suspicious, and they did not believe that Qixiang and his colleagues came not to save the Hui but to seek peaceful resolution and mutual concession. On that very night, about one thousand Hui cadres – all of those who could be found in the city of Zhengzhou regardless of their specific position and responsibility – were transported to

Nanren and stationed there to appease the Hui. A tedious working method was nonetheless faithfully followed: they dropped by every household and knocked on every door to convince the Hui to put down the arm and accept the intervention of the government. Suspected by the Han, they were no less unwelcomed by the Hui. Most could not find accommodation in the village, despite the fact that they belonged to the same ethnic group and shared the same ethnic identity with the Hui in Nanren. "We had to take naps in our cars," said Qixiang, "the Director of the Provincial Commission of Ethnic Affairs, a man over sixty, shared the same car with me, wrapped up in a worn coat."

Although Qixiang narrated the story from the perspective of a Hui cadre, we should note that a significant number of Han cadres were also involved in this massive governmental intervention. An ethnic division of labor was strictly observed: the Han cadres were stationed in the neighboring Han villages and charged with the responsibility to disarm and appease the enraged Han. The hard work seemed to have born its fruit – the morning of the 29th did not see any breakout in Nanren. Shortly before the dawn, after a brief rest, Qixiang and his other Hui colleagues were once again on their way to a new round of persuasion and placation. Things had been progressing steadily and smoothly, until they heard the anxious voice from the loudspeaker installed on the minaret of the village mosque. Instead of the call to prayer, they heard a call to arms,

> Folks of Nanren, are you still staying home unarmed, waiting for your own deaths? Do you still believe that these Hui cadres, the people of the government, are here to help us? Come out and see for yourselves! The Han are getting themselves organized and armed, they are marching towards our village, they are here to slaughter us! We have been cheated! We are besieged like the stuffing of a dumpling (*bao jiaozi*)!

"It was actually true!" Qixiang recalled to me. The Han in the surrounding villages had formed organized units despite the painstaking effort of the Han cadres, and some Hui cadres – including Qixiang – even suspected that the Han cadres themselves had in fact offered their silent assistance. All that had by then been done by Qixiang and his colleagues were completely overturned, and they now became to the Hui villagers less the peace-making ally than the disguised agent sent by the Han-dominated government to dupe the ill-informed Hui. The shared ethnic identity, instead of conducing to the production of an "ethnic sentiment" that may increase the efficacy of political work, merely intensified the antagonism between the Hui cadres and those whom they were supposed to "represent" and whose language they were presumed to be able to speak.

Paramilitary forces and anti-revolt police were brought in, and the usual tactic of segregation was again deployed. The police force, standing behind the fragile protection of shields, dug trenches and formed walls of human flesh to separate the crowds. The Han amounted to over ten thousand, and kept battering the police wall. Hui houses were set ablaze, cars burnt down. "You can hear the cracks, the pit-a-pats that resulted from the burning of home appliances," Qixiang recalled, "I saw the explosion of a car, the fire and smoke shadowed the sun. It was insane, it was insane…We had to look on, we could do nothing. The provincial governor and the Party secretary just watched – they could do nothing, just like us."

Two regiments from the 128th Division arrived around 5 p.m. on the 29th. Replacing the crumbling police forces, the troops stayed in and around Nanren for four days, patrolling the streets and passing the security responsibility to the local police as the conflict gradually subsided in the week that followed. Qixiang was scrupulous in his

recounting the details of the incident; he was especially assiduous with the number of deaths, insisting on informing me of the reason behind each death and rejecting the "unfounded conjectures" of "some Western media." "Three Hui died before the confrontation on the 29th; three Han died during it." He told me. Qixiang's prudence impressed his supervisors. The Nanren conflict was the turning point where Qixiang eventually crossed the threshold to become an ethnic cadre *per se*. His Hui identity now became the existential marker of his institutional position and figured prominently in what he was expected to do and how he was supposed to do it.

For Qixiang, the valorization of ethnic identity and his becoming an ethnic cadre occur in an emergency, at the moment when a crisis urgently demand a large number of ethnic cadres who are seen by the state to be able to communicate with "their own people" because they share with them a "natural ethnic sentiment." It is neither logical reasoning nor public deliberation as much as an immediate affective bonding that is presumed by the state to define what an ethnic cadre is or should be and determines the particular use to which ethnic cadres can be subjected in state bureaucracy. Qixiang was not appointed into the Provincial Commission for Ethnic Affairs because he was particularly able to "represent" the Hui in Henan – the Commission itself is a branch of the Henan Provincial Government and a cog within the massive administrative machine which is not intended to be a "representative body" in the first place. He was promoted primarily because he was considered able to utilize his "ethnic sentiment" and his "natural bond" with the Hui in a particularly masterful way that could help the government efficiently and effectively manage inter-ethnic crisis. The limited political representation allowed him is equally based upon this presumption of immediate affective connection: that Qixiang could

represent the Hui because, quite "naturally," he himself is one of them and knows or should know from his own being what the Hui want. He is presumed to speak not so much *for* them than *as* one of them, and the ground upon which he stands – the "natural bond" – both validates his position of enunciation and at one and the same time provincializes the term and content of the discourse he would enunciate as an ethnic cadre.

Qixiang is certainly not the only Hui cadre changed by the crisis. The intensity of the Zhongmou conflict also forced Li Chengyu, then Governor of Henan Province, into a politically testing and tactically demanding predicament from which perhaps no one could emerge unscathed. Born as a Hui in Haiyuan County, Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, Li rose steadily up the bureaucratic hierarchy and was appointed Governor of Henan in 2003, after years of service in lower positions in the provincial government. Bearing a good name of immunity in contrast to the dark economy of bribery prevalent in the Chinese bureaucracy, Li was also thought by many Hui as one of the few Hui cadres that could ever make it to the top. "He often brought his own utensils in the trunk of his car when he was on official visits," a Hui imam told me, and "he tried his best to abstain from pork and alcohol, and would reject any offer of illegal (*harem*) entertainment." His good name among the Hui, however, became precisely that which silenced him in the maelstrom of the Zhongmou conflict. Another well-connected Hui imam, after the evening prayer when we were sitting on the carpet, related to me:

> Shortly after the Zhongmou incident, some Hui blocked the entrance to the provincial government and publicly accused Li Chengyu of his immoral betrayal of his own people. There were much finger-pointing and talks of his knees-bending, his surrender to the Han superiors, his silence in the face of the suffering of the Hui. But what can he do? Many of his political

> foes were looking on attentively. They were eager to seize upon any hint of "ethnic sentiment" (*minzu ganqing*) that might slip out of Li's reaction in order to accuse him of parochial ethno-nationalism (*difang minzu zhuyi*). He had to remain silent. He did nothing and could have done nothing.

Li Chengyu was not an ethnic cadre. His Hui identity did not figure significantly in his bureaucratic position as the Governor of Henan. But he was nonetheless hailed to respond and to assume at the moment of this response the very role of an ethnic cadre. Being himself a Hui and with a name of cherishing his ethnic identity, he was seen to be a rare representative of the Hui in the Chinese political machine who could speak up for his own people at the critical time of crisis. He had to respond to a situation that acutely exposed the dilemma of his institutional position and may with one single stroke end his political career. The point is not whether he should have come out or even whether indeed the Hui had suffered unjust violence that demanded legal redress. Li could not intervene to right a wrong even if such a wrong had been committed to the Hui, because his intervention, inherently tainted by an "ethnic sentiment" attributed to all ethnic cadres and seen as the definitive character of such positions, would necessarily elicit suspicion and retroactively invalidate the legitimacy of any claim of retributive justice that might have held before his intervention. Although "ethnic sentiment" is defined by the state as the marker of ethnic cadres and the condition for the effective performance of their representative role, the same "sentiment," given its presumed immediacy, equally silences their voices and necessarily invalidates their discourses. An unmediated political representation predicated upon "sentiment" is intrinsically self-contradictory, and ethnic cadres are situated precisely in this excruciatingly paradoxical position.

Paradox of Representation

In this section, I trace a history of the present and provide an account of the beginnings and immediate ramifications of the institutional arrangements that carve out the bureaucratic space in which the ethnic cadre is located. Although one should not underestimate the significance of successive governmental reforms in the past several decades prompted by the broader social, economic, and political transformations, I would nonetheless maintain that the paradoxical subject position of the ethnic cadre has remained fundamentally intact since the Communist takeover in 1949. As a matter of fact, what is considered exceptional during the "ultra-leftist" Anti-Rightist Campaign in the 1950s is merely a particularly striking manifestation of the general institutional dilemma faced by ethnic cadres that has yet to be resolved. In the realm of the ethnic question, one has good reasons to wonder if the spectres of socialism have ever been conjured away.

Often associated with but not exclusively tied to the political institution of ethnic regional autonomy, the appointment of ethnic minorities into the Chinese state bureaucracy often follows two different political logics. On the one hand, it is construed as a measure to achieve administrative efficiency in places where minorities are concentrated. Ethnic cadres, according to this biopolitical logic, are better equipped in their linguistic skills and knowledge of local specificities; they are presumed to know better than Han cadres how the general forces of economic circulation should be inflected in order to account for the particularity of local conditions and in what ways minority areas can be differentially integrated into the broader network of national economy. But this biopolitical logic is inherently inadequate. There is no strong reason to suppose that a smart and responsible Han cadre cannot through appropriate training acquire a working

knowledge of local conditions at least sufficient for increasing administrative efficiency. Throughout the 1950s, an enormous number of Han cadres were recruited by the CCP precisely for such training, and inter-ethnic collaborations were actively facilitated in the bureaucratic system of ethnic autonomous areas. Therefore, the dominant official discourse in justifying the appointment of ethnic cadres since the 1950s, instead of focusing upon their administrative usefulness, often frames it as enhancing the political representation of ethnic minorities in state organs and governmental institutions. The often statistically significant presence of ethnic cadres in the government of ethnic autonomous regions is presumed to indicate the fundamental change in the political status accorded ethnic minorities: they are now free to "administer their own affairs" and given the concrete power to do so, since they have "their own cadres" working in state institutions and "their own people" speaking up for them whenever policies were devised that might impact them.

To be sure, the appointment of ethnic cadres is not the only state policy in expanding the political representation of ethnic minorities. As Thomas Mullaney has shown in his recent book, the Ethnic Identification Project (*minzu shibie*) in the early 1950s was not simply a social scientific endeavor to render China's ethno-scape legible to the governing state. A more urgent task was at stake: in order to draft an election law for the inaugural session of the National People's Congress (*remin daibiao dahui*) and to decide on the quota that should be reserved for ethnic representatives, the ruling CCP must first acquire a reliable knowledge of how many ethnic minorities China has and the number of population of each, a knowledge indispensable for reaching a numerically judicious distribution of ethnic representatives (Mullaney, 2011, pp.18-21). But the

straightforwardness of the quota system, set up by the Chinese state to demonstrate the directness of their effort to grant ethnic minorities political equality and preferential policies, only belies its fundamental drawback: no institutionally guaranteed link (such as legally prescribed and procedurally felicitous elections) is established between the ethnic identity of ethnic cadres and their representative function. A female Hui university professor might be selected as a deputy to the National Congress, but her proposal might be about the reform of college education and she may sit in the same discussion room with other non-Hui (though not necessarily all Han) intellectuals debating the state governance of universities. She might also be a representative who speaks in the role of an educated woman and participates in Congressional debate as a member of the All-China Women's Federation. In both cases, however, she would continue to be counted as an "ethnic representative" although ethnic identity itself is irrelevant to her specific role as a political deputy.

Compared to ethnic deputies, ethnic cadres in state administrative bodies are often seen to possess more concrete power. It is by setting the institutional position of ethnic cadres against that of ethnic deputies that we can examine more specifically the particular dilemma that grips the former. In the 1950s, the CCP established a vast number of "nationality colleges" and professional schools designed specifically to train ethnic cadres, intellectuals and technical personnel. This first generation of ethnic cadres played particularly critical roles in the profoundly influential Ethnic Identification Project: those from whom the social scientific state extracted "local knowledge" upon which it developed a more comprehensive ethnic categorization were often not ordinary minorities but ethnic cadres and intellectuals who were able to narrate who they were or dispute

who they were not in the language they were taught in nationality colleges and professional schools (cf. Litzinger, 2000). This does not mean that the Ethnic Identification Project in the 1950s was exclusively an intra-governmental campaign. But it nonetheless demonstrates the sandwiched position of ethnic cadres: on the one hand, they were (and continue to be) treated by the Han-majority state as coming from elsewhere and bearing a difference that needed to be known and governed; on the other, they were equally detached from the ethnic "mass" (*qunzhong*) and distanced from the latter by the official education they received and the language they were thus enabled to speak. They function as a middle layer that translates ethnic difference into something legible and governable to the modernizing state – but not too legible and too governable as to become eventually assimilated into the Han. Their special treatment by the state is predicated upon the constant and precarious maintenance of a particular modality of ethnic difference: on the one hand, they must remain different in order to demonstrate that they are still keeping that "natural bond" with their own ethnic groups from which they are enlisted and to which they are still supposed to be inextricably connected. The gradual disappearance of recognizable difference or the perceived intention to renounce one's ethnic identity would deprive them of the definitive character that marks their bureaucratic position and could prematurely end their political career. On the other, however, they must not become too different as to invite the suspicion and accusation of "parochial ethno-nationalism," a particularly pernicious term whose history I will examine in a moment.

Being different but not so much – this is one way of characterizing the particular structural dilemma that traps ethnic cadres (cf. Bhabha, 1994). But this is far from the

whole story. Stevan Harrell once remarked on the difference between an ordinary Han cadre and an ethnic cadre, "[s/he, i.e. the ethnic cadre] was a broker not only between the state and local community but also between a local culture and a modernizing state dominated by a hegemonic national culture associated primarily with the majority Han nationality" (Harrell, 2007, pp. 222). And this, according to Harrell, locates ethnic cadres in the contemporary variation of the "civilizing project" that have over the centuries been given different faces by the Chines state, imperial, Republican, or Communist (Harrell, 1995, pp. 3-36; 2007, pp. 223). The story often narrated is one of how ethnic cadres have to mediate between contradictory forces (Han state vs. ethnic minorities) and how they "represent" the presumably far-away state to the minorities at the margin (Mueggler, 2001). However, little attention has been paid to the institutional conditions that have practically produced for the ethnic cadres a paradoxical position which is not caught between contradictory forces (as Harrell argues) as much as it forecloses the possibility for subject formation. In order to substantiate this point, I will now return to a key moment in the making of ethnic cadre in the early history of Communist China, namely, the Anti-Parochial-Ethno-Nationalism Campaign (*fan difang minzu zhuyi yundong*, hereafter the APEN Campaign) in late 1950s and early 1960s.

The APEN Campaign is a particular aspect of the more general Anti-Rightist Movement in the late 1950s which in turn was merely a prelude to the more radical years of the Chinese Cultural Revolution. Though situated in this general background and necessarily influenced by the vulgar class analysis dominant in the official discourse of this period, the APEN campaign nonetheless bears its own irreducible specificity that cannot be completely subsumed under the Anti-Rightist Movement (cf. Das, 1979, pp.

132-3). We should certainly not underestimate the role of intra-party factionalism and the complex mechanisms of social mobilization and class politics in the APEN Campaign. But this should not hold us from examining more carefully how accusations were specifically framed, what discursive logic was followed, and in what ways certain criticisms were rendered convincing and hard to argue against. Although the "ethnic question" is often seen as subsumed under the "class question" during this period, there nonetheless exists, as I shall try to show subsequently, a relatively autonomous discursive domain in which the accusation of parochial ethno-nationalism sharpens its particularly powerful rhetoric.

In 1958, Liu Chun, a veteran Party member then working in the State Commission of Ethnic Affairs, delivered a lecture in the heyday of the APEN Campaign. The title of the lecture was "Rectify Ethnic Sentiment, Criticize Parochial Ethno-Nationalism." The grammatical form of the title says much about the discursive manipulation that pervades political struggles of this period: an imperative without a subject that abstracts a local criticism into a general movement supposed to be based upon mass participation. As to what counts as "ethnic sentiment," Liu Chun's deceptively straightforward definition belies its ominous message:

> Ethnic sentiment is different from ethno-nationalism. The former is usually expressed as a feeling for the interests of one's own ethnic group, including, of course, the love of one's ethno-history, cultural tradition, or other forms that reflect one's ethnic identity. Generally speaking, we can allow the existence of ethnic sentiment. Sometimes, such sentiment is even necessary – for example, when the rights to equality of one's own ethnic group are unfairly impinged upon or interfered with, or when one's own ethnic group is prejudiced against or inappropriately criticized. Ethnic sentiment in this case is completely understandable when it is expressed as a form of discontent. However, the bourgeois ethnic sentiment is fundamentally different from the proletarian ethnic sentiment: the former

> is merely an expression of the interest of the exploitative class, while the latter is that of the interest of the general mass. Accordingly, the bourgeois ethnic sentiment is fundamentally different from the proletarian ethnic sentiment.
>
> (Department of Propaganda, 1960, pp. 81-2)

Liu Chun's disambiguation was not addressed to the "general mass." His lecture was delivered on a Party meeting and was directed specifically towards ethnic cadres. But the distinction he made between "bourgeois ethnic sentiment" and "proletarian ethnic sentiment" is highly ambiguous, and this ambiguity is made all the more sinister since the object is "a feeling" whose presumed spontaneity merely excludes those who have such a "feeling" from defining what it means by themselves. An "ethnic sentiment," given its presumed naturalness and immediacy, necessarily passes the power of definition and interpretation to the hands of those who observe it from the outside. The paradox is that only a particular kind of "natural feeling" is allowed, while all "*natural* feelings" are seen to be beyond conscious intervention. It is not always clear what particular kind of "natural feeling" ethnic cadres are supposed to demonstrate to their supervisors and Han colleagues, and how they could strike a difficult – if at all possible – balance between the appearance of spontaneity and the aspiration to the Communist ideal. One could hardly know when a "proletarian ethnic sentiment" may slip into a "bourgeois" one, and the moment of recognition in retrospect might come after – instead of before – the moment of political accusation and subsequent purge. Presumed to be speaking always from "ethnic sentiment" in their role of as political mediators, the institutional position of ethnic cadres is marked by the definitive uncertainty attached to the "natural feeling" which perhaps is not and can never be "natural" in political struggles.

Four years before Liu Chun's lecture, on the CCP's 8th National Congress in 1956, Ulanhuu, then Director of the State Commission of Ethnic Affairs, announced the CCP's official attitude to ethnic cadres: "The major point for training ethnic cadres is to trust them, to use and promote them without suspicion. We should not only help them improve their abilities and enhance their progress; we should trust the improvements and the progresses that they have made, letting them take responsibilities independently. We should cherish their love for their own ethnic groups and appreciate their ethnic sentiment when it comes to the interests of their ethnic groups. We shouldn't blame this sentiment. The importance of ethnic cadres lies in that they have an especially intimate affinity with the people of their own ethnic groups and uphold particularly impassioned anticipation for the emancipation and development of their own ethnic groups. They, therefore, are uniquely positioned to express the will and interest of their own people" (People Publishing House, 1958a, pp. 51). What Ulanhuu termed "especially intimate affinity" (*tebie miqie de lianxi*) was also named "natural bond" (*tianran lianxi*) in other Communist documents of this period. The condescending tone is unmistakable. The pervasive modal verb is "should" – the flip side of "we shouldn't blame this sentiment" is that "the ethnic cadres are *naturally* inclined to side with their own people." They are useful not merely because of what they do or can do, but what they are able to do is always pre-determined by who they are. To Ulanhuu, "we shouldn't" blame this "natural inclination," but work *with* it, and turn this "nature" into an advantage for "our" governance. On the one hand, it is supposed that there exists an *immediate* and "especially intimate affinity," a *natural* bond, between ethnic cadres and "their own people," and this "nature" defines their institutional being. On the other, however, this

immediate nature is given the heavy duty of *mediating* the political representation of ethnic minorities, and it has to mediate in a particular way: ethnic cadres must represent the demand of "their own people" and frame it in the idiom of a Communist vision by definition removed from "natural feeling." If the institutionally-structured being of ethnic cadres is fundamentally determined by an "immediate nature" and their political career is founded precisely upon this unmediated "intimate affinity," how can they achieve a *non-natural* and *impartial* representation in this intrinsically *partial* position? Could "ethnic sentiment" ever be a justifiable ground for defending the allegedly unbiased political equality promised to all ethnic minorities? Can universality, impartiality, neutrality, and disinterestedness – values that are located and can only be located within a public sphere (the specific form and limit of this public sphere can be subject to permanent dispute) – be derived from within particularity, and from a particularly "private" particularity that is "natural sentiment?" (cf. Arendt, 1958, pp. 22-78; cf. Hegel & Baillie, 1967, pp. 228-240; Marx, 1972[1843])

We are no longer trudging the waters of contradictory forces, either between state and local community, or between dominant majority culture and marginalized minority culture. The point that deserves more attention is rather the internal structural contradiction that marks the bureaucratic position to which the ethnic cadres are assigned by the Chinese state. Liu Chun's ominous critique, delivered in the heyday of the APEN Campaign and which initiated a devastating strike against a group of senior Communist ethnic cadres, was not an aberrant exception in the years of socialist "ultra-leftism." Neither was Ulanhuu's advisory suggestion the last remnant of an ephemeral golden era of the new China, before the onset of totalitarian monstrosity. To defend a *public* equality

and a *political* justice by means of a *private* bond and a *natural* ethnic sentiment – this is bound to fail from the very beginning. The division between the public and the private, a structural character presumed by the CCP to belong to the bygone era of bourgeois hegemony, is uncannily recuperated – though publicly denied – when it comes to the institutional position of ethnic cadres. There is, in other words, a line that runs consistently through Ulanhuu's suggestion and Liu Chun's accusation.

Ethnic cadres necessarily have to walk on thin ice whether before, during, or after the APEN Campaign. The duel between Liu Geping and Yang Jingren, two eminent ethnic cadres of Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region in the 1960s, reveals with much concrete detail how the paradoxical institutional position of ethnic cadres is materialized in actual political battle. Both Liu and Yang were veteran Party members from the Hui, and both were core members in Ningxia Party Committee in late 1950s. Coming from two different provinces (Liu from Hebei, and Yang from Gansu) and each being the major patron of a large clique formed over years of work before the CCP assumed power, Liu and Yang were located at the center of factionalist struggles in Ningxia both before and during the Cultural Revolution. One of the attacks waged against Liu in late 1950s, for instance, accused him of being strongly inclined to appoint cadres from his own clique which consisted predominantly of people from Hebei and Shandong Provinces, where Liu worked as a commander of guerilla warfare before moving to Ningxia (Red Guard, 1967). But the major and most catastrophic criticism from which Liu could not emerge unscathed came in 1960.

It all started with the 1959 National Olympics. The opening ceremony was a splendid pageant of the cultural particularity of each province, embodied by its own athletes and

materialized specifically in the carefully designed costumes. What was especially eye-catching, as many expected, was the traditional costumes donned by ethnic athletes to demonstrate the multi-ethnic character of the new Republic. But compared to the colorful costumes worn by the Tibetans and the Uyghur, those of the Hui athletes (*taqiya* for men, and *hijab* for women) appeared in the eyes of those expecting a spectacle to be overly unassuming and inadequate in marking out the Hui as an ethnic group and Ningxia as an ethnic autonomous region. In an attempt to stage a spectacular performance in similar occasions in the future, Liu Geping, then Governor of Ningxia, threw his support behind the establishment of a new government office responsible specifically for designing a new Hui costume. Things went smoothly, and in the same year, the new consume was ready for demonstration. A conference was convened and many Hui cadres, Liu included, happily played the role of models. Photographers and documentary filmmakers were invited to capture this wonderful moment – no one expected, however, that these apparently innocent photographs and footages would become the evidence that abruptly truncated the political career of many.

Political wind soon changed its direction. Yang Jingren seized the chance and targeted Liu with a barrage of accusations. Members of his clique both in Ningxia and in the Central Party Committee in Beijing insinuated that Liu deliberately consolidated and expanded ethnic distinctions by creating a new Hui costume. To demonstrate his own credential in making this argument and to set himself diametrically opposed to the reactionary position ascribed to Liu, Yang publicly announced his impassioned support of the national movement that both coaxed and coerced the Hui into raising pigs either in individual homesteads or on the collective farm (as pork was considered the major source

of protein for all Chinese and pig-raising a key site to demonstrate loyal allegiance to the Communist cause in Maoist China). He enthusiastically propagated for Hui-Han marriage and even tried to find his own daughter a Han husband – a practice seen by many Hui to be outrageous and scandalous. Seeking avidly to play the "woman-giver" and thus locating himself on the other side in the imagined asymmetrical exchange of women that structures the Hui imaginary, Yang was not merely ignoring his Hui identity. He was zealously *negating* it, deliberately revoking his ethnicity in the most radical manner imaginable to a Hui.

Though Yang Jingren might be considered, as many Hui tended to see him, an extreme example, he was not fundamentally an exception from the "norm". To the contrary, he substantiated the paradoxical "norm" in an intriguing way and dramatically illustrated the latent structural paradox that inheres in the position of ethnic cadre: the only possible way to preempt once and for all the accusation of "parochial ethno-nationalism" is by recourse to a compulsive negation of one's ethnic identity and a complete rejection of one's ethnicity. The only way to appear as a legitimate ethnic cadre qualified to make impartial judgments and disinterested decisions is precisely to consciously and painstakingly repudiate that "natural bond" only for which they are appointed into the government in the first place. In order to bear the credential to deliver justice and equality and to speak for "their own people," ethnic cadres must necessarily fly in the face of justice and equality. They must always speak *against* their "own people" in order to be able to speak *for* them, though the moment of speaking-for is indefinitely deferred due to the paradoxical logic of their position. The very condition for speaking goes precisely against that which is to be spoken: ethnic cadres are given an obligation to

speak that which is rendered strictly unspeakable by their institutional position. Yang Jingren was detested by many Hui. He seemed to have testified to an old wisdom passed down generations among the Hui: that the higher a Hui gets in the state bureaucracy (imperial or otherwise), the more reluctant he would become to speak for his own people. But this old wisdom now speaks to a new institutional arrangement previously nonexistent in any imperial bureaucracy. There might indeed have been plenty of Hui imperial officials who had betrayed their own people, but none had done it from a position structured in such a way that the possibility for political speaking is strictly foreclosed. The institution of ethnic cadre works precisely *against* the political representation of ethnic minorities. To a Hui cadre, the only safe route, the only infallible option, it seems, is to either remain silent or to speak deliberately against one's "own people" – but not too much, not too hard, unless one becomes "too similar" to the point where one is no longer different enough to qualify as an "ethnic cadre." The limited political representation that might occasionally be achieved by ethnic cadres has to breathe in this tiny and precarious space.

Politics of Denial

Xinhua was a Han cadre who had been working in the Henan Provincial Commission of Ethnic Affairs for sixteen years. He started his job in 1995, when the provincial government first moved into the current building, then newly completed with all state-of-the-art facilities. Now, when he was approaching the end of his career and preparing for retirement, the provincial government was again set for relocation, again to a state-of-the-art complex recently completed in the new developmental zone located east of Zhengzhou. Xinhua was Director of the Office of Law and Policy when I met him, a

short and skinny old man, quiet but determined with his own principles. In his small office, he didn't mind breaking open the conversation with a critique of many young cadres who were taking over the provincial commission. "They know nothing about the laws and policies regarding ethnic minorities," said he. "We used to have study sessions First weekly, and then monthly. Everyone had to be familiar with all the documents, all the rules and regulations. All administrative decisions might be in accordance with these laws. But now, no one cares. My office is turning into a consulting firm – they would simply drop by and confirm with me whether what they have already planned or even started to do is lawful. They don't start with law, but law seems to be a marginal concern."

The marginalization of law in the routine governance of ethnic difference is a concrete fact. Specifically for Henan, the only provincial law regarding ethnic minorities was promulgated in 1994, one year before Xinhua assumed office. All his efforts in subsequent years to get his proposal for revisions passed in the Provincial Congress were to no avail. An exhaustive search of the official online database set up by the National Congress of all laws and regulations of the People's Republic of China shows that since the mid-1990s, no new laws or significant revisions of old ones have been recorded either at the national level or below, and the "ethnic question" has practically been stuck in a legal dead water, despite the tumultuous mutations of the broader social and economic environment, as if all laws that are ever needed in this regard have already been set down and all that is left is merely effective execution.

One institutional puzzle that one has to grapple with while studying the Chinese governance of ethnic minorities is a strange devolution and concentration in one single institution or even individual of governmental functions that nonetheless remain split

between different state departments when one turns one's gaze to the national level. The State Commission of Ethnic Affairs, established in the 1950s, takes full charge in supervising the governance of ethnic minorities at the national level. The State Bureau of Religious Affairs, established during the same period and with the same administrative status as the former, is given the responsibility of supervising the governance of religious affairs. Both are departments of the State Council and both have branch offices in lower-level governments. However, the distinction between ethnic and religious affairs, highly visible at the national level, becomes administratively blurred when we move to the provincial level. Instead of reinforcing this crucial and politically charged split by distributing the two types of affairs to two different administrative bodies, most provincial governments subsume the governance of both under one single institution, often named Commission of Ethnic Affairs, which is then internally divided into different divisions that separately address ethnic and religious affairs. The tendency for governmental convergence becomes more conspicuous when one goes even further down to the county level, where an administrative division of labor almost invariably gives way to a confusion of responsibilities due to a shortage of personnel. In other words, immediately below the national level, the governance of religious and ethnic affairs are often combined in a single institution whose internal division of labor progressively breaks down and verges upon complete disappearance as one moves down the hierarchy.

This institutional devolution is not the only, nor the most befuddling puzzle we need to come to terms with if we want to pry open the institutional logic in the governance of ethnic difference in China. Different levels of government often play different roles and the complex interactional dynamics between them further complicate the picture. A

young Hui cadre in the Henan Provincial Commission of Ethnic Affairs once described to me the particular function assigned to the Provincial Commission, in contrast to its lower offices:

> Our job is primarily propaganda. We seldom deal with concrete issues, although one crucial function of the Commission is administrative re-adjudication. But almost invariably, all disputes and discontents are resolved primarily at the county level. Very few cases will be forwarded to us for re-adjudication. When reports reach us, they are often tepid accounts of things of the past. If you really want to study the ethnic question, I recommend that you go down to the rural counties.

This was not the first time, nor the last, that I was given the injunction to "go down" because "we don't work with concrete issues." Qixiang, as another Hui cadre in the Provincial Commission, always suggested that I stay in a rural county for a couple of weeks to observe the "authentic life" of the Hui and to experience the "reality" of the ethnic question, as if his own life as a Hui cadre, or the life of many other urban Hui, is by definition "inauthentic." However, the injunction nevertheless reveals a critical point: on the one hand, where a relatively elaborate division of governmental labor exists, i.e. at the national and provincial level, the obligation is primarily one of propaganda (that is, a singular simple function of monologue, speaking without having to listen). On the other, where such a division is almost nonexistent and a severe shortage of both personnel and funding is almost the norm, i.e. at the county and township level, the responsibilities that have to be born are overwhelmingly numerous and minute, ranging from arbitrating minor ethnic frictions to negotiating preferential policies for local businesses run by ethnic entrepreneurs.

The institutional disadvantage of the county bureaus in charge of ethnic and religious affairs far exceeds their tight budget, lack of personnel, and grinding workload. In 2008, a

bill was passed in the National Congress that allowed the State Council to implement its new plan for intra-government institutional reform, intended for the reduction of superfluous and dysfunctional offices and the re-arrangement of the internal division of administrative labor for higher efficiency. Although primarily an effort at re-organizing the structure of the central government, the effects nonetheless rippled to the extremes of the gigantic bureaucratic machine. “We are always the last to stay and the first to go,” a middle-aged Hui cadre in a county bureau of religious affairs once complained to me. “We are always at the forefront of any government downsize, as if what we do is by nature expendable.” A critical outcome of the 2008 reform is the abolition of the independent institutional status of the county bureaus and their subsidiary incorporation into the CCP’s department of the United Front at the county level. The 2008 institutional reform therefore excludes the routinized governance of ethnic difference from the government and subjects it to the intervention of the ground-level Party committees. The county bureaus, no longer part of the governmental body, meanwhile lose the legally prescribed administrative power in managing routine ethnic and religious affairs.

Despite all constitutional stipulations that dictate the unconditional and absolute power of the Party in China, it is, officially speaking, nonetheless not part of the government. The CCP runs behind the government, parallel to it, dictates its commands to it, but for all that does not collapse into it. Whether it is beyond the law or whether it operates in a field where the rule of law is sidestepped, the Party itself cannot publicly and directly exercise administrative power on a daily basis. A local Party secretariat cannot intervene in daily administration in his role as a Party secretariat. He must act through the mediation of those who hold governmental positions, or in the role he might

himself assume in the government. It is the government that can officially claim any legal status; the Party, for all its power, must necessarily remain in the shadow, relegated to a domain not necessarily illegal, but fundamentally *a-legal*. The subordinate integration of the county bureaus – previously a government institution – into the county department of the United Front thus pushes the former into a shadowy domain. "What we used to be able to do, we can no longer do it now," a Hui cadre in a newly Party-ized county bureau in Henan told me. "We used to have the legal power for administrative intervention (*xingzheng zhifa quan*). But now, whenever we try to intervene, we always have to be prepared for a question we cannot answer: you are no longer a government agency with legally prescribed power, so who gives you the power to intervene? We can no longer work directly, but have to beat around the bush. This is the major problem after the institutional reform." This is not to say that the Party's power is truncated and restrained by its lack of a publicly recognized lawful status. It merely means that its a-legal form of operation would render certain of its peripheral appurtenances susceptible to a lack of direct power – they have to, as the Hui cadre said, "beat around the bush." The very form in which the CCP exercises its unhampered power nevertheless restricts its operation at certain points.

The predicament of the county bureaus after the 2008 reform is only the most recent manifestation of a general principle in the governance of ethnic difference that has been followed for a long time at the township and village levels. If the county bureau occupies a precarious position in the governmental machine and always remains vulnerable to abolition and subordinate enfolding into the Party, even a semblance of this weak institution does not exist when we reach the township level, where the governance of

ethnic and religious affairs is and has always been only one among many other responsibilities of an individual cadre, who performs his/her obligations principally as a member of the department of the United Front of his town Party committee. The loss of the independent governmental and legal status of the county bureau only indicates the ascension of an underlying governmental logic that has long been at work at the ground level. Since the practical governance of ethnic and religious affairs operates primarily at levels below that of the county, it is arguable that this governance follows a fundamentally a-legal Party logic. The rule of law, though not entirely absent, nonetheless does not form the backbone for such governance. In contrast to the law which operates mainly in the public domain where articulated rules and regulations are accorded determining importance and where the court is one of the most marked – certainly not the exclusive – location for settling disputes, the Party logic, expressed particularly in the practical methodology of the United Front as it manifests itself in the governance of ethnic and religious affairs, confounds the critical distinction between the public and the private. The politics of ethnic difference in this context is separate from both the realm of law and the public domain in general, characterized by hyper-visibility and a language whose limit and condition of existence are constantly subject to critical examination. That which is revealed to the public gaze or for the inquiry of the higher authority is already the end result of a battle fought elsewhere and in the past – "when reports reach us, they are often tepid accounts of things of the past."

It is tempting to argue that a privileging of invisibility and privatization marks perhaps all forms of authoritarian and dictatorial politics which depend for the reproduction of their rule precisely upon the absence and active forestalling of the

formation of a public domain. Nonetheless, we should pay attention to the particular form in which this privatization manifests itself in China's governance of ethnic difference. The operation of this politics of invisibility is not confined to the ground level but extends to cover the entire field of this governance and defines its basic coordinates. In the words of Yang Jing – then Director of the State Commission of Ethnic Affairs – related to me by Jianguo, the supervisor of Qixiang in the Henan Provincial Commission, the governance of ethnic difference is always in a "subsidiary" position, and the commissions and bureaus, if they continue to be given an independent institutional status in the administrative machine, should always stay "on the side" and in a position that "assists" other governmental bodies which play major roles in executing daily administration. The governance of ethnic difference is not and should never aspire to situate itself at the center of the stage, and its success lies precisely in the performance of a denial: that "ethnic question," fundamentally speaking, does not and will not exist, and the governance of ethnic difference, therefore, is always and must always be marginal and auxiliary. Jianguo put this in particularly revealing terms,

> We are always assisting others. No job is properly ours. Neither should we try to zone out a domain distinctively ours. That's not how you brag about your own importance. Some of us simply cannot come to terms with this truth. They want a dramatic show of their achievements, they want all to know that they have done a great deal. But you see, the success of your job hinges precisely upon having nothing to be shown – as if nothing has happened and nothing will ever happen, as if you are useless and the commission itself completely superfluous. This is precisely what is desired in this job. You see, bluffing gets you nowhere.

The institutional position of ethnic cadres, insofar as they work in the governance of ethnic difference, therefore necessarily relegates them to a marginal status and merely intensifies the privatization of their role as political representatives of their ethnic groups

in the bureaucratic machine. Their work might be important, but it is important only to the extent that it cannot be revealed to the public gaze. The success of their work depends upon the appearance that there is simply no work to be done in the first place, as if "there is no such a thing as the ethnic question," at least not one that would become relevant *politically*. The privatization of political representation is imbricated with this politics of denial, and the role of "ethnic sentiment" is merely reinforced in this governmental regime: everything needs to be resolved in a private manner and by recourse to an a-political "natural bond." That "nothing has happened" is the magical mantra; mediocrity, or the *appearance* of it, is the golden rule. Recall how Qixiang and his fellow Hui cadres worked in the Zhongmou conflict: they had to "knock on every door", "drop by every household". Work was done and was expected to be most effectively done behind the door, in the dark recess of the intimate family, in the most private of the private refuges where "sentiment" instead of public reasoning was presumed to reign supreme.

Conclusion

Though some legal scholars have in recent years used the term "affirmative action" to describe China's governance of ethnic difference, its applicability to the state's preferential appointment of ethnic cadres into the administrative body, however, remains problematic (Sautman, 2010, 1998). The previous chapter has already demonstrated why the institution of ethnic regional autonomy cannot be subsumed under the legal category of "affirmative action;" this chapter has taken up the task of showing that neither can the political representation of ethnic minorities by means of ethnic cadres be designated as "affirmative action" unless one ignores all the institutional complications I have described and analyzed. The institutional position of ethnic cadres is intrinsically

paradoxical precisely because the very nature of their job is by definition the privatization of a political representation which is possible only in a public sphere. Ethnic cadres are officially summoned to work in the dark, to intervene in the shadow. They are called upon to rely on a fundamental partiality – an arresting and inescapable partiality thought to be rooted in their very being (their "natural bond" with their "own people") – in order to reach a public impartiality (equality between all ethnic groups) which is structurally unreachable in their position. "Ethnic sentiment" is good only when ethnic cadres do not speak up "for their own people" though they are expected to. It becomes bad at the very moment when political representation materializes into actual words. One is given the right and the position *to* speak, but this right and this position necessarily occlude any actual speaking. One is given a mouth but deprived of a voice.

The affective consequence entailed by this paradox is acutely felt – though not necessarily articulated – by the Hui cadres I worked with in my fieldwork. "Ethnic cadres often have to do their job with bound hands," said Zunjie, one of the deputy directors of Henan Provincial Commission of Ethnic Affairs. "The point is, if you have an open-minded leader, a supportive superior, you can unbind your hands and relax. It all depends on whether they trust you." But "their" trust can only be acquired on an *ad hoc* basis, and it is not rule so much as it is the rare exception. When I related Zunjie's words to Qixiang, he sighed, but immediately followed up with a short yet determined assertion, "right, that's why we *have* to be there – otherwise, *who* would speak for our people?" An interpellation that summons the hailed to a place where the formation of a subject is foreclosed nevertheless institutes a non-subject position where the awareness of one's own ethnic identity is not attenuated as much as intensified. This is ethno-nationalism

produced *within* the Chinese state bureaucracy and by means of the very *intra*-government institutional logic which is supposed to work precisely against any "parochial ethno-nationalism" in the first place. A politics of denial only reinforces in its own way that which it tries painstakingly to deny, and a privatization of political representation merely exacerbates that which it attempts to privatize. This is the paradox whose unpredictable future the Chinese state has to grapple with in its own turn.

Conclusion

Two braided lines run through this dissertation: on the one hand, I have examined the institutional and symbolic conditions by means of which Hui Islam acquires particularly tenacious traction in the concrete social world. I have tried to show the internal contradictions and ironies that inhere in the precarious maintenance of religious difference in an environment where it constitutes merely a "minority religion." The entwinement of Islam and ethnicity and the "ethnicization" of Islam among the Hui, as I have attempted to show in a variety of places in this dissertation, are predicated upon an imaginary relationship of exchange between the male Hui and the male Han, in which the (Han) woman functions ideologically as the silenced mediation by means of which Hui Islam could be imagined as the object desired by the Han male other. Ethnicization (and at times racialization) of religious difference in this context is intrinsically and structurally determined by gender and more specifically, by the domestication of sexual difference. On the other, I have studied how the ethnicization of Islam among the Hui is appropriated by the late socialist state and re-located in a particularly Chinese socialist politics of ethnicity. In this political space, it is precisely because ethnicity is politically *irrelevant* that it becomes paradoxically a key site where the façade of socialism is secured and the CCP's overt political allegiance to socialism publicly claimed. The state's appropriation of the regime of ethnic categorization, by officially recognizing and reifying the intertwinement of Islam and ethnicity among the Hui, merely reinforces the masculinist ideological conditions that structure the Hui imaginary. Neither ethnic

regional autonomy nor the appointment of ethnic cadres, due to the internal institutional arrangements that determine their operation, can fulfill the function anticipated of them. On the one hand, ethnic regional autonomy follows a biopolitical logic and intervenes at a level slightly removed from actual ethnic minorities taken as collective subjects bearing legal-juridical rights to special benefits. This biopolitical regime, however, also entails peculiar political effects that intensify the spectral character of ethnicity in socialist politics. On the other hand, the political representation of minorities by ethnic cadres is essentially privatized and the paradox intrinsic to the political appropriation of "ethnic sentiment" renders ethnic cadres structurally incapable of speaking out for their own people, to the point where they cannot not betray what they are expected to do. This structural silencing, as I have attempted to show in chapter seven, merely strengthens the ethnic sentiment of Hui cadres and actively produces them as ethnicized subjects.

Although I do acknowledge the immense power commanded by the modernizing Chinese state (first nationalist republican, then socialist) in introducing the modern Western discourses of nationalism and ethnicity into the governance of its multi-ethnic citizen subjects and the particular vicissitudes of the term *minzu* in contemporary Chinese politics, I have not treated the ethnicization of Islam among the Hui as completely determined by this state intervention. Gender becomes significant precisely when we begin to ask how the imbrication of religion with ethnicity, instead of being an empirical fact, can become libidinally cathected and acquire specific affective value among the Hui. The structural domestication of sexual difference, as I have argued in a variety of chapters, is *constitutive* – though in different yet interrelated ways – of the contemporary Hui imaginary, despite the vast socio-economic and religious sectarian diversities among

the Hui. The ethnicization of Hui Islam is constitutively engendered and enabled by an imagined asymmetrical exchange of women engaged with the male Han other. In treating the ethnicization of Islam as completely the result of modern state intervention, one would lose sight of the structural conditions that enable the modern Hui imaginary and overlook how the effectiveness of political policies hinges not (merely) upon forceful imposition as much as on incorporating and even strengthening that which already exists among the governed. The functioning of the socialist politics of ethnicity specifically among the Hui, therefore, also capitalizes on the structural domestication of sexual difference. The state does not contradict as much as affirm the masculinist ideology of Hui Islam by officially recognizing and reinforcing the *minzu* status of the Hui.

Anthropologists of China have long noted the complex and profound vicissitudes of the term *minzu* in the history of modern China (Gladney, 2004, 1998b, 1991; Fan, 2001; Harrell, 1995, 2001a, 2001b; Mueggler, 2001; Schein, 2000; Litzinger, 2000; Blum, 2001). Translated initially from Japanese and used in a variety of different contexts to designate human groupings that range from an "ethnic group," a "race," or a "nationality," *minzu* is perhaps one of the few neologisms that still produce much resonation in contemporary Chinese politics, especially when an increasingly aggressive Chinese Han nationalism is again on the rise. But little attention has been paid to the particularly socialist context in which the word is inscribed and how socialism – more particularly its Chinese variation – transforms both its semantics and pragmatics in the past six decades. The "ethnic question" in China is often reduced to one of opposition between state oppression of ethnic minorities and the occasional outbreak of ethnic separatism and political ethno-nationalism. Socialism, however, seldom becomes the object of study and

the specificity of the socialist politics of ethnicity, especially in its Chinese variation, rarely receives the attention due to it. In this dissertation, I have treated socialism seriously and have traced its contour in the particular domain of the "ethnic question." The Chinese socialist politics does have its own internal logic which must be addressed in its own term, and one cannot reduce it completely to "authoritarianism" which only partially and inaccurately describes how China's state power operates.

By locating Hui Islam and its ethnicization within socialist politics, I have also tried in this dissertation to probe tentatively how Islam as an "ethnicized" religion can be studied under the socialist condition without reducing the mode of relationship between socialism and religion completely to one of coercive oppression. The mediation of ethnicity in the socialist governance of Hui Islam has created a particular political situation which is markedly different from that of liberal politics and which, therefore, gives the Western debate on secularism and secularization (primarily though not exclusively in a liberal political framework) only limited purchase in my discussion (Casanova, 1994; Asad, 2009, 2003, 1993; Mahmood, 2005, 2009, 2006; Connolly, 1999, 1995; Gourgouris; Taylor, 2007; Bilgrami, 2011; Scott & Hirschkind, 2006; Habermas, 2006, 2008). Though the ethnicization and even "racialization" of Islam can also be observed elsewhere in the world, the specific form in which it operates and the political consequences it entails vary across different contexts and differ especially between liberal and socialist politics. If studies of Islam in Europe have constantly to grapple with the historical legacy of colonialism and the contemporary vicissitudes of neocolonialism, racism, immigrant labor and the so-called "global war on terror" (Scott, 2007, 2005; Bowen, 2010, 2007; Ewing, 2008), the anthropological examination of Hui Islam in

China cannot avoid addressing the specificity of the socialist politics of ethnicity. This critical distinction determines how religious difference is defined and governed, what particular political language is spoken or allowed to be spoken, what kind of "public sphere" is instituted, and what political functions this public sphere can or cannot fulfill. Under the socialist condition, one cannot ask in a direct manner, as it is often done in liberal politics, whether "secularism" is a political ideal worth fighting for or how the idea of secularity can be extricated from both secularism as a political principle and secularization as a teleological social transformation. But this does not mean that secularism under the socialist condition is necessarily synonymous with the forced eradication or at the very least silent suppression of all religions. Mediated by the politics of ethnicity (hence applicable only to certain and surely not all religions), a socialist secularism within the particularly Chinese context would also possess its own internal logic and bear its own political possibilities and limitations.[42] The distinction between the public and the private under the socialist condition would also differ in its specific modality from both the classical Greek iteration and the contemporary liberal variation. The very publicness of ethnicity in China's socialism exceeds what is often meant by "public" in liberal politics, and Hui Islam is governed and produces its own exclusion and marginalization in this socialist "public space."

To be sure, different ethno-religious groups in China are differentially situated in relation to the socialist politics of ethnicity, and the political space afforded each by this politics would also differ accordingly. I have been able to examine the complexity of socialism in relation to Islam and the particularly subtle operation of the spectral politics

[42] For studies on secularism in the socialist context, see Ballinger & Ghodsee, 2011; Buturovic, 2007

of ethnicity in China mainly because my primary object of study in this dissertation is the Hui. It is because the governance of Hui Islam is situated in a more flexible space than that allowed for either Uyghur Islam or Tibetan Buddhism that I am given the chance to dwell upon the contemporary ramifications of socialism instead of focusing merely upon authoritarian control, police surveillance, or even state terror. What is no less important is that the Han are rarely mentioned in the socialist politics of ethnicity, and Han religious traditions, be it Confucianism,[43] Daoism, Shamanism, or other localized popular religions and cultic practices, are seldom subject to the same mediation of the politics of ethnicity as Hui Islam has been subjected to. This has made the Han religions more vulnerable to the socialist propagation and at times forceful imposition of atheism – it is not secularism as much as a coercive secularization that Han religions have often been subjected to since the 1950s (Goossaert, 2007; Goossaert & Palmer, 2011; Yang, 2008; Yang, 2012; Yang & Tamney, 2005; Chau, 2006; Ashiwa & Wank, 2009; Lozada, 2001; Palmer, 2007). Because of these vast variations and differences across different ethnic groups and religious traditions, a socialist secularism in China mediated by the politics of ethnicity would not have a relatively articulate shape as that possessed by liberal secularism, and the terms of governance and political debate would also differ.

This dissertation has shown that the particular tenacity of Hui Islam in China hinges upon a series of institutional and symbolic conditions, and these conditions in turn depend for their reproduction upon structurally regimented exclusions. The story told, therefore, is not merely how a marginal religion of an ethnic minority persists in a Han-centered world and what the local dynamics are that enable this perhaps admirable

[43] For debates on whether Confucianism constitutes a "religion" in the modern Western sense of the word, see Chen, 1999; Sun, 2013.

persistence. What must also be registered and paid due attention to is the hidden mechanism of exclusion that can at least in part explain the affective and libidinal conditions that structure the Hui imaginary. The exclusion and marginalization of woman subtends the politically profound Hui imagination that they are not "foreigners" but "Chinese" – neither completely Han nor completely non-Han. Focusing upon the Hui cannot necessarily help us "dislocate China" or find "other Chinas" which can then be used to criticize an imagined monolithic Han China (cf. Gladney, 2004; Litzinger, 2000). It merely demonstrates how "Han-ness" is distributed beyond the empirical Han and how "minorities" are not necessarily "minorities" in their imaginary relationship with the Han, to the point where some ethnic minorities – for instance the Hui – do not displace the masculinist Han ethno-centrism as much as reinforce it even while they are trying to carve out a space of their own. (cf. Wang, 2003, 1977) The socialist politics of ethnicity cannot thematize and critically intervene in this paradoxical intensification of Han ethno-centrism. Neither can the socialist governance of Hui Islam produce the kind of politics able to address more adequately the exclusion of woman that lies at the core of the intertwinement of religion and ethnicity among the Hui. The critical question is not merely how an authoritarian regime works to suppress ethnic and religious difference, but what particular kind of public state and transformative politics are needed so that the internal complexities and limiting conditions of these differences themselves can be revealed and addressed. It is within the problematic gauged by this general question that I would like to locate my study of the ethno-religious difference of the Hui in this dissertation.

Epilogue

Gender, Again

A key argument of this dissertation is that the ethnicization of Hui Islam is *constitutively* engendered and fundamentally enabled by an imagined asymmetrical exchange of women engaged with the Han male other. In my treatment of sexual difference, I have tried to draw a sharp distinction between the voice of the woman who speaks and the maternal voice that either speaks through her or is foreclosed by the position of enunciation she is given to inhabit. This means that I must be able to demonstrate what kind of voice counts as the maternal voice, why the voice of the woman does not necessarily converge with the maternal voice, and how we can tell the difference between the maternal voice and the paternal voice that possibly speaks through the woman. A more general question has to be addressed which pertains directly to these concerns: how can we study "woman" without reducing the irreducible specificity of sexual difference? Or, put slightly differently, how can we force open and keep intact the specific conceptual space where the examination of gender relations is not and cannot be collapsed into an empiricist study of "woman?"

It is with these questions in mind that I have chosen to rely upon insights gained from Lévi-Straussian structuralist anthropology and Lacanian psychoanalysis in analyzing sexual difference and the position of woman in Hui Islam. This deliberate choice is justified by the particular form in which gender presents itself in the ethnicization of Islam among contemporary Hui: the theme of an exchange of women figures prominently

in the mode of relationship the Hui imagine to have obtained between them and the Han majority. The spiral entwinement of exchange as a quintessential form of the social and the constitutive function of the woman in mediating the foundational institution of a patriarchal social formation determines that the structuralist theories of Lévi-Strauss and Lacan are perhaps most appropriate in helping us grasp the specific modality in which gender acquires its significance in Hui Islam. On the one hand, if – in the idiom of Althusser – Marxism is a "scientific theory" of the social and its usage of "class" transforms the latter from a descriptive concept into an essentially analytical one (thus giving to "class" its critical conceptual and sociological specificity – it is not "class" as much as "class struggle" that marks the Marxian theoretical revolution) (Althusser, 1971, 1970; Althusser & Balibar, 1970), Lacanian (and Freudian – but in a slightly different way) psychoanalysis also gives to sexual difference its irreducible conceptual specificity and locates it squarely at the core of the institution of sociality in general (Lacan, Mitchell, & Rose, 1985). On the other hand, Lévi-Strauss, primarily in his *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, merely demonstrates the particular tenacity of the masculinist imaginary by arguing that all forms of sociality necessarily rely upon the exchange of women without probing the possibility that this sociality-instituting exchange is the necessary foundation only of a particular form of the social that is male-centered (Lévi-Strauss, 1969). Levi-Strauss's exquisite analysis in fact exposes how sociality and sexuality are deeply and inextricably intertwined, and how sexual difference is "a different difference" that must on the one hand be distinguished from racial, ethnic or cultural difference, and on the other, from class distinction which has its own conceptual and sociological specificity in the Marxian theory. Both Marxism and

psychoanalysis are strictly speaking *social* theory, and both examine the *constitutive* condition of the social instead of merely studying empirically observable "social phenomena." The specificity of sexual difference, in other words, can be found only in a structural(ist) analysis that unfolds at a level slightly removed from empiricist historicism (Copjec, 2002, 1994).

The role of woman in Hui Islam has not gone unnoticed in international media. But this interest hardly goes beyond a telescoped empirical observation that merely abstracts the concrete world of the Hui women and relocates it in a discourse whose idiom is crafted at a level far removed from both Hui Islam and China – although a nominal homage is paid to both. The existence of women's mosques in China, for instance, has been celebrated by some Western scholars as an indication of a more "liberal tradition" of contemporary Islam in contradistinction to the Saudi-centered "puritanical" Wahhabism. An article published in *New York Times* on October 9, 2012, while championing female imams and women's mosques in China as offering a "vision of an older form of Islam that has inclusiveness and tolerance, not marginalization and extremism, at its core," quotes Khaled Abou El Fadl, a prominent Islamic legal scholar based at UCLA,

> Contemporary fundamentalist movements use the space provided by the mosque to affirm all types of patriarchy and male power over women…When you have something like the Chinese example, which ultimately empowers women to work within their own space and lead prayer and manage that space on their own, it's a significant form of women asserting themselves in the Islamic tradition, helping in constructing it and perpetuating it…I always see Islam in places in China as reminding Muslims of their authentic tradition before it was impacted by petrol dollars and this very gruff and dry form of Bedouin Islam that came out of Saudi Arabia…So the point is there's an old, historically rooted tradition, and the Chinese, if they tap into this tradition, they can effectively provide resistance or examples of resistance to puritanical Islam.

(Tatlow, 2012a; cf. Tatlow, 2012b)

With the lack of locally rooted structural analysis of the position that female imams and women's mosques are assigned to occupy in Hui Islam, their mere empirical existence, given its straightforward appearance, is made to speak to a transnational situation which perhaps more concerns Professor Abou El Fadl than the local Hui women themselves. The language is one of contrast: the "gruff and dry…Bedouin Islam" versus the "authentic tradition" indexed by Hui Islam, and the "puritanical" Wahhabism versus the "moderate" Hui tradition which "empowers women to work within their own space and lead prayers and manage that space on their own." We should note in this compliment a specific mechanism in domesticating sexual difference which operates precisely by playing up the role of "woman:" in diametric opposition and speaking directly and perhaps exclusively to those who seize upon gender to accuse Islam of "intolerance," "extremism," or "archaism," this apologetic comment merely *re-appropriates* "woman" in order to convey a message that reverses the negative image in which Islam has often been portrayed. The point is that in this mirroring, both the accusation and the apologetic have to depend for the transmission and affirmation of their message upon the *mediation* of the woman figure. Both have to speak *through* and *by means of* woman, meanwhile closing the very space where the irreducible specificity of sexual difference can be examined.

This foreclosure of gender in favor of an empiricist study of "woman" perhaps culminates in Saba Mamood's enormously influential *Politics of Piety,* a book that purports to study the role of "women" in the Egyptian mosque movement as a part of the more general Islamic Revival in the so-called "Islamic world." At the beginning of her

study, she claims unequivocally that “the question of how the hierarchical system of gender relations that the mosque movement upholds should be *practically* transformed is, on the one hand, impossible to answer and, on the other hand, not ours to ask.” Mahmood insists that “any social and political transformation is always a function of local, contingent, and emplaced struggles whose blueprint cannot be worked out or predicted in advance” (Mahmood, 2005, pp. 36). She locates this caution within the lesson gained from the grave consequences caused by the telescoped and externally imposed vision of “colonial feminism” and “the politics of ‘global sisterhood’,” seen as detached from the intricacies of the local worlds in which gender relations are concretely inscribed. In Mahmood’s project, the specification of the local world and the particularization of gender relations are accomplished by moving away from the problematic of “will” and “freedom” and into the domain of bodily disposition and ethical self-cultivation. She does not want to debate whether the Egyptian Muslim women are “willing” to surrender to the patriarchal norm to which they have been subjected, and attempts to suspend the assumption of a “desire” that can be detached from the instituting force of social norm. For her, it is not locating the site and revealing the form of resistance as much as describing and analyzing the specific form in which norm is practiced, inhabited, and substantiated that deserve attention: “My goal is not to explain why this particular system of gender inequality exists [note she does acknowledge that gender inequality exists in the system she studies], but to ask: How did the women of the mosque movement practically work upon themselves in order to become the desirous subject of this authoritative discourse?” (Ibid., pp. 112-3) The argument of the whole book boils down to this:

> The account I have presented of the mosque movement shows that the distinction between the subject's real desires and obligatory social conventions – a distinction at the center of liberal, and at times progressive, thought – cannot be assumed, precisely because socially prescribed forms of behavior constitute the conditions for the emergence of the self as such and are integral to its realization. One of the issues such a conception of self raises is: How does one rethink the question of individual freedom in a context where the distinction between the subject's own desires and socially prescribed performances cannot be so easily presumed, and where submission to certain forms of (external) authority is a condition for the self to achieve its potentiality. What kind of politics would be deemed desirable and viable in a discursive tradition that regards conventions (socially prescribed performances) as necessary to the self's realization?
>
> (Ibid., pp. 149)

The arguments are enticing and the questions provocative. But in what way does this general critique of a certain "modern normative sovereign subject" pertain to gender, except that women in Mahmood's project are seen as specific examples used merely to buttress a pre-fabricated philosophical argument which does not fundamentally concern sexual difference? By returning "feminism" back into "the liberal tradition," what is equally obliterated is precisely the specificity of gender in the general problematic that interests Mahmood. Somewhat symptomatically, it is as if only by means of women and through their indispensible mediation that Mahmood can increase the persuasive power of her argument which in fact speaks merely of (male?) ethical self-cultivation and social convention. It is undoubtedly remarkable – perhaps even striking if we read its contemporary popularity as indexical of a more general domestication of sexual difference both in anthropology and beyond – that we find not so much a direct confrontation with sexual difference as its domestication and subtraction in a book that purports to study "Muslim women." This irony is made all the more alarming since it is the *Egyptian* Muslim women who have been made to speak to a "liberal" tradition which is not theirs. Mahmood is acutely aware of the grave consequences of "global sisterhood"

and “colonial feminism.” Yet she merely mirrors – hence reproduces in an inverted manner – what she criticizes. The palimpsest of the “South Muslim women” – a doubly overwritten text because of the intricate intertwinement of international political economy and sexual difference – still awaits a reading that does not hasten to assimilate its obliterated message into transnational discourses in which women are appropriated in opposite yet interlocked ways (cf. Spivak, 1988).

To be sure, there are “Muslim women” who fall outside this tight circuit and whose language, perhaps unsurprisingly, would prove largely unintelligible – hence hardly memorable – to those of us eager to locate them in a particular kind of politically-informed discourse that will interest “the West.” Since the 1980s, the government of Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region has been engaged in a large-scale migration project that moves the agricultural population living in the arid and bleak mountainous area in its south to the relatively fertile north where livelihood might be more easily sought. A large portion of those who have thus been uprooted and dislocated belong to the Hui, and many in fact are affiliated with different religious sects or Sufi orders. Each community, after the massive relocation, has to rebuild their own mosque, and some communities, because of the co-existence of different sects and Sufi orders, have to build more than one mosque each with its own parish. Both the provincial and the local governments provide a meager subsidy to the displaced residents, but absolutely no funding can be allocated to support mosque construction as the state must remain officially “neutral” in any affair that pertains to religion. “The state just wants to choke Islam,” said Yiming, the Jahriyya Sufi cleric whom I have discussed in chapter three.

His view in fact is not uncommon among those I interviewed. Since each relocated community only has itself to fall back on in raising the money to build the new mosque(s) and most – if not all – residents are merely poor peasants many of whom do not even have enough money to build their own houses, the construction of a mosque, instead of solidifying communal linkages, very often only rends the communal social fabric, rendering some into local strangers upon whom rains suspicion and accusation. Those who are able to donate a designated amount (often calculated on a per capita basis, but collected with the family as the basic unit) are extended respect, whereas those who cannot are occasionally even excluded from entering the mosque for prayer, since they have not contributed what they should have and the mosque, therefore, cannot be made to serve his religious needs (women's mosques, perhaps imaginably, hardly receive any attention, if at all). Hongsibao, a rural district in the city of Wuzhong surrounded by villages housing primarily "migrants for ecological reasons" (*shengtai yimin*) as the displaced residents are often called (or just *yimin*, "the migrants"), is one such place where one can find a multitude of relocated communities. I visited Hongsibao near the end of my stay in Ningxia, since I wanted to briefly study how the money for mosque reconstruction is collected, the usual amount needed, how much each family has to pay, and most importantly, how long it often takes for a mosque to be built and where the community of believers pray and conduct other collective religious services before the eventual completion of the mosque. I wanted, in other words, to study how Hui Islam is maintained in a dynamic suburban context where the local socio-economic conditions are undergoing rapid and unprecedented transformations.

As I entered one of the villages that surrounded Hongsibao, an aged Hui woman in her sixties wearing a headscarf was sitting in front of her house. Seeing me approaching, she stood up. “Are you a migrant? (*ninshi yimin ba*?)” I asked, merely intending it to be a conversation opener.

“I moved down from up there…(*wo cong shangbian ban xialai de* – note here that the word for “move” is *ban*, not *yi*, which is used in the word *yimin*, “migrant”)” She pointed in a direction which I supposed was south. “And we moved here two years ago.”

“Oh, so you are a migrant.” I was merely mumbling and getting prepared for the next round of questions. But somehow strangely, she was perceptibly hesitating, and before I found my voice for my questions, she asked,

> What is a migrant (*shenme shi yimin*)?

Her voice was even lower than that of my meaningless mumbling, and I simply did not know how to explain it to her. She had much more intimate knowledge of what being a migrant meant and how migration was defined in the most concretely visceral terms. She *was* a migrant and she *lived* that life which was a migrant’s life. Nonetheless, she did not *know* what the term meant that had been used to name her in official discourses and in the academic discourse by means of which I first knew the general social transformation that had completely changed her life. Neither did she know, as I soon discovered, how much money her family had contributed to building the communal mosque, although the mosque itself was only five minutes’ walk away from her house. She wanted to help me, but she couldn’t. Nonetheless, she wanted me to stay for a while and waited for her husband. “He knows all this,” said she.

And she was right. Her husband, a man in his early seventies, could clearly recall that his family had donated 5000 RMB for the construction of the village mosque – it was he who gave the cash to the people who came to collect it. The word "migrant" he knew all too well, and he was able to give me a rich story of the local dynamics and tensions revealed by the negotiations involved in the bargaining. He kept talking, while his wife, the woman who initially welcomed me into their house, was merely standing on the side, interjecting "yes, yes" into the silence that punctuated my conversation with her husband.

But her voice, silent and hesitant, yet precisely because of this silence and hesitation, resonates and unsettles, dislocates and disturbs. Perhaps it is incompatible with (or should we *make* it incompatible with?) the interlocked circuit that appropriates "Muslim women" by paradoxically domesticating and surreptitiously subtracting sexual difference. Perhaps, as some of us may well argue, this voice is utterly *irrelevant* to Islam or to "Muslim women" and points to a question that does not at all pertain to gender. Unable to answer these questions and meanwhile suspecting their very answerability, I would nonetheless like to inscribe this somewhat strange and out-of-place voice at the end of this dissertation. And the voice, let's remember, is materialized by a question, speaking not to tell a story but to demonstrate the limit of language:

> What is a migrant (*shenme shi yimin*)?

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